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Judith of Bohemia*

A STORY OF ARTISTIC AND THEATRICAL LIFE IN LONDON

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IT was a stormy night in mid January. The pavements were swept by drenching sheets of rain, and a piercing wind was blowing.

In that Franco-Italian corner of London called Soho the streets were almost deserted by ten o'clock. From behind the closed blinds of the little cafés and drinking-shops came bursts of music and laughter. Half-way down New Compton Street, Bastien Dumont, tumbling down the steps leading to the Café Turc and pushing open the door, was met with the twang of a mandolin and a light, gay tenor voice singing "Funiculi, Funicula."

Bastien was Anglo-French, one of a score of struggling artists who frequented the little café. The place was something like a club for the indigent who would sip the wine of life, but who must have it cheap.

There were two rooms at the Café Turc—the first just below the level of the street,

small and low-ceiled, with the bar, the coffee-urns, and a reredos of bottles on the left; the second a few steps lower still, much larger, equally low in pitch, with sanded floor and some dozen tables, big and little, ranged round the walls. These walls displayed a heterogeneous collection of sketches, legacies from various artists.

One night a great man had sat there and laughed over his wine, and had turned and drawn a girl's head on the wall behind him. His had been a name to conjure with. Over the sketch now hung a faded laurel-wreath, with a bow of rusty crape, and the lovely head and the careless signature that had become immortal were covered with glass. Every artist who entered the cave-like café looked at those few pencil-strokes and paid homage to genius.

To-night damp and smoke filled the place with a fog that it was all but impossible to see through. The acrid odor of stale smoke

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was improved by the fragrance of coffee and the comforting smell of wine dregs mingling with the aroma of the stock-pot.

At the door the young man paused, blinking, and expelling a grateful breath.

"*Peste*, what a night!" he exclaimed. Groping his way through the blue-gray fog to the shining counter, he shook the proprietor by the hand. "What a night!" he cried in a warm, youthful voice. "Is Judy here?"

The proprietor was a small, spare man with a yellow, eagle-feathered face, a shock of iron-gray stubbly hair, and a thick black mustache. He was supposed to be an Algerian, and was never seen without a fez. He rejoiced in the rather savage name of M. Baousse, but was known to all his clients as "the general."

He returned Dumont's greeting and answered his question in the French language, which the young man had used.

"I have not seen Judy yet, M. Dumont; but she will doubtless be here. Chummy is in there." He jerked his thumb toward the inner room.

Dumont passed on, calling out a greeting here and there to friends who sat in smoke-circled groups. Between the two rooms the man who was singing to his mandolin rose and looked at him expectantly. This was Dan, the waiter and general factotum of the establishment—a lanking being who looked like a clown in his baggy clothes.

Dumont ordered coffee and cognac, and, entering the inner room, was noisily greeted by a crowd of men at one of the larger tables. Room was made for him, and he sat down among them.

At a table on the opposite side of the room to the one at which Bastien Dumont had joined his friends, two men were sitting. Of the other tables, most were occupied by groups of twos and threes.

From time to time glances of curiosity were directed at the two men. For one thing, they were not habitués of the place, and it was seldom that strangers came to the Café Turc. One of them, however, was known to several people there. He was Vincent Stornaway, a successful portrait-painter, who had long ago abandoned any pretense of a Bohemian life. He exuded prosperity with his faintly picturesque clothes, his flowing tie, his golden brown beard, pale cheeks, and clear, healthy skin.

His companion was known to nobody, and various unflattering comments were

passed on his appearance. He was unprepossessing to a degree, his pallid face being fleshy and heavy-jawed, his eyes pale and small and sunk in puffy bags, his forehead low and square and livid against a band of coarse black hair. He had a big hooked nose and a thick neck, and there was a sinister suggestion in the straight line of his lips, which were thin and peevish, and contradicted all the rest of his face.

"A libertine with a bad temper," murmured clever Tony Leigh, the cruelest caricaturist with the kindest heart in the world.

"Good shot, Tony!" said another man. "I wonder who the chap can be!"

But nobody happened to know Vincent Stornaway well enough, so their curiosity about his companion could not be gratified. It was five years since the artist had regularly frequented the Café Turc, and none of the elder habitués were present on this particular night.

As a matter of fact, Stornaway's companion was Bruce Gideon, a financier, whose portrait the artist was painting as a present from an insurance company with which Gideon was associated. During the sittings Gideon had shown much interest in the life of artists, and the two men had become friendly to a certain extent. Gideon had asked Stornaway to dinner at his flat in Mount Street, and had expressed a desire to see a real bit of the poorer Bohemia. Stornaway had thought of the Café Turc, of his long-past struggles, and had brought his host to what he had described as London's nearest approach to the artist life of Paris.

"You will see men who literally go cold and hungry," he said; "men who actually live on nothing but dreams."

And it was true.

The rich man looked about him while he smoked his fat cigar. From his little eyes no one would have known what he was thinking—whether he despised these shabby, long-haired, lean-faced youths, these queer-looking women with their eyes full of visions, or whether there stirred in him some vague envy of the ardent minds that can transcend hardship and want, and can work, suffer, and enjoy on the wings of a great idea.

To the left of Vincent Stornaway and his companion was a young woman sitting at a table all alone. As other men and women came in, nearly all of them greeted her, and some lingered a moment by her side. A

man now and then asked her to have some refreshment; but nobody sat down at her table.

As they went out, they spoke to her again. One young fellow, with an ardent idealistic face, said very affectionately:

"Good night, Chummy dear!"

She answered all greetings in the same way, without enthusiasm, as a matter of course. She accepted refreshment every now and then. From time to time she smiled a beautiful smile, like that of a child.

Bruce Gideon turned with an interrogation to Stornaway, who, as it happened, could enlighten him.

"That girl has a remarkable story," the artist said in a low voice, turning toward his companion so that his words should not carry. "Do you think her beautiful?"

"Not exactly," Gideon answered. "Too colorless."

His voice, kept low in imitation of the other man's, was surprisingly soft—quite at variance with his appearance, and almost like a woman's.

"She was considered the most beautiful girl in London some years ago," the artist continued. He pointed behind him to the glazed sketch surmounted by the crape-decorated wreath. "Chanlery did this head of her. She was like a young Diana then."

Gideon had paid his homage to the dead master's work as he came in.

"Good Lord!" he said. "You don't mean that's the same woman? What happened to her?"

"Love," replied Stornaway. "She fell in love with a boy who used practically to live here—Alan Steyne, an artist. At least, he was trying to be an artist, and starving meanwhile. It was one of those terrific passions. They were inseparable—couldn't breathe apart. She was working at Wiloughby's art school. She was about eighteen at the time, and he was a few years older. She's the daughter of an Oxford don. I've forgotten his name—he died in Switzerland, climbing—I can't remember which mountain. Her mother was dead long before. She was very well born—an earl's daughter, I think."

Gideon turned, and his small eyes made a quick survey of the young woman's fair face.

"I thought she didn't quite fit in here," he said. "Go on, Stornaway. This is most interesting."

"One day Alan Steyne disappeared—just like that, without a word—just deserted her. She wasn't the kind that could stand it. It wasn't an ordinary love-affair—not on her part, at any rate. She didn't exist apart from him, and every one thought he was equally fond of her. I used to come here quite often in those days, and I saw a good deal of them."

"What became of the fellow?" Gideon asked.

"Nobody knows—never heard of since. He was clever, but impatient—didn't care about going through the mill. He's never done anything in the art world, or one would have heard of him. The girl went to pieces—nearly died, you know; and when she struggled back again she was like she is now."

"Do you mean she's mad?" asked the rich man with interest.

"Not exactly. Silly, I should say—not quite all there—childish."

"And how does she live?"

"Everybody looks after her, as far as I can make out. She's the pet of this place. At first she must have had a little money. She didn't seem to have any relations. Little by little she became the adopted child of the chaps who come here. She never painted since Alan Steyne left her. I don't quite know how it's managed, but nobody would let her want. Lately she's been living with another girl—a girl they call Judy. Judy is more or less of a newcomer—since my time; but I've seen her when I've been here. I don't come often. Some one told me that she was looking after Chummy. I think she's a model herself—a queer, savage-looking sort of a girl."

"How long ago did this happen?" Gideon asked.

"Let me see—about seven years ago, I suppose. Yes; it's five years since I used to come here regularly, and then Chummy was quite an institution."

II

A SLIP of a girl pushed open the door and came into the Café Turc. She shook herself like a dog, and the rain-drops fell from her in showers.

Everybody in the front room knew her and greeted her.

"Hullo, Judy! Cheerio, Judy! Welcome to the ark, Judy!"

"Good evening, Miss Jud-e-e," said the general, adding, with paternal solicitude:

"You have no umbrella; you are wet through!"

Dan, the waiter, told her in perfervid Italian that her eyes were brighter than any stars, and in English that he would advise her to have a glass of hot punch.

The girl answered them all with laughing words in a voice that was husky, partly by nature, and partly owing to a bad cold. She advanced with a series of shakes, and finally divested herself of the shabby mackintosh she was wearing. Underneath, she had a very short skirt of a dark tartan and a bright green jersey with threads of gold showing here and there. On her head was a battered white felt hat, very much pulled over her eyes.

Her face was like a flower—like a much-painted lily, or, rather, like one of those delicate, paper-white narcissus blooms that vandals sometimes submit to some chemical process which dyes them pink. Like those tortured blossoms, Judith Grant's face was gaudy with its cheap paint and powder and lamp-black that sullied and disguised the wonder of its youth; but it was charming, for all that, and flower-like. Once a man looked at it, he often had to look again and again.

She had a mop of short, red-gold hair and big eyes the color of dark purple pansies, and a mouth that was always laughing. She was very small. Artists used her as a model for the line of her neck and shoulders, and for her hands and feet, which were pretty nearly perfect.

Sometimes, when her profession failed her, she got into a chorus. She was a born dancer, but she never stayed long, and had never achieved promotion on the stage. For one thing she had no voice, and she was so small that she was lost in the crowd.

Her entrance into the inner room was greeted with another chorus. Everybody knew her.

"Hullo, boys!" she cried, as she jumped the three steps in a bound. She looked round and saw the fair girl alone at her table. "Ah, there's my family!" she exclaimed, walking over to Chummy, and flinging down her mackintosh on a chair and her hat on the top of it.

She sat down beside her friend, and Dan brought her a steaming tumbler of punch. Two or three of the men at the big table came over and talked to the two girls.

Bruce Gideon's interest was manifestly aroused. He sat silent, watching them.

Chummy, the fair girl, smiled at the men and talked. She looked quite vacant except when she smiled. They evidently treated her as a child. One of them patted her hand kindly as he moved away.

Judy lit a cigaret. When she sipped her punch, she made a wry face.

"Filthy stuff!" she cried gaily. "But honestly, my inside's frozen, including my heart! Anything to thaw it—eh, Michael, old boy?"

She threw a kiss to one of the young men. There was something irresistible under her vulgarity. Gideon's small eyes dwelt on the shape of her head, on the heavy, natural waves of the red-gold hair, on the arched eyebrows, black as ink, and the forehead as smooth and pure as a child's.

Presently the young men had all strolled away. Gideon turned to Stornaway.

"Could you introduce me?" he asked. "Do you know them?"

"Oh, yes," the artist replied with a smile. "Besides, it's not necessary to know any one in this place. I think they all know who I am," he added with the complacent touch of success.

The two men rose and walked over to the girls' table, and Stornaway told them who he was in his charming way.

"I don't expect you remember me, Miss Judy," he added; "but I have had the pleasure of meeting you. I don't come here often now—don't get time, worse luck!"

"Oh, but, of course, you're a great toff, Mr. Stornaway," the girl answered, with mischief in her eyes that lightened them and made them sparkle like amethysts.

He introduced Gideon. Judy nodded to him and presented him to her friend, whose name she gave as Miss Morley.

Chummy looked at him with her straight, soulless gaze. He saw that her eyes were golden brown, and that her beauty was really faultless, and must have been startling when illumined by intelligence.

"Oh!" she said in her deep, bell-like voice. "Oh, ugly man! Very ugly man! Man just like Punch!"

Gideon wasn't at all touchy about his appearance. He was supposed rather to glory in it. He saw that Judy tried to suppress the gleam of sheer amusement in her eyes.

Stornaway gave an embarrassed smile; but Gideon himself smiled broadly, thus distinctly adding to his resemblance to that typical figure of fun. He turned to the other girl.

"Didn't I hear that your name is Judy, Miss Grant?" he asked. When he smiled, the ill-nature disappeared from his face, but it gained in grossness. "We only want dog Toby to be complete!"

"You mustn't mind what Chummy says," Judy answered.

They talked for a few minutes; then other newcomers came up. Gideon could see that they were all desperately poor. In every stitch of Judy's clothing he saw penurious shabbiness. Her cheeks were too hollow, her eyes too bright.

The two men took their leave. It was still pouring with rain. Presently they found a cab.

Gideon sat silent for a few moments; then he expelled a sudden breath.

"What a monstrous shame it is!" he muttered.

"What is a shame?" asked Stornaway.

"That that girl should live that life!"

"Ah, so you realize what she might have been! You should have seen her when Chanlery sketched her on the wall."

"Bah, I don't mean your love-sick moon-beam!" said Gideon.

"Who do you mean?"

"Don't be a fool," the rich man replied impatiently. "Of course, I mean the other one."

"What—Judy?" The artist laughed. "Did she strike you particularly? Of course, she's got a lot of go in her, but she's only a common little cat."

III

INSIDE the Café Turc the atmosphere grew thicker and thicker. Through the smoky haze the faces of the customers showed like so many blurred gray smudges. Each newcomer added to the steam as he shook his garments. Dan's gay voice, singing of blue skies and warm suns and sparkling seas, was a veritable mockery.

It was getting late. Judy picked up her hat, clapped it on her head, and then rapped on the table with a penny.

Bastien Dumont, the Anglo-French artist, saw her. He rose, and he and another man strolled over to her table. His companion sat down beside Chummy and began to talk to her.

Dumont made a sign to Judy. There was something urgent in his lean, picturesque face. When one looked at him carefully, one saw that he was not quite so young as his warm, rich voice and alert fig-

ure led one to suppose. His eyes were both tender and sad as they rested on the girl's painted face.

He drew her over to a vacant table in a corner.

"I have news," he whispered. "I have the most wonderful news for Chummy, but I don't know how to break it to her. What do you think, Judy? I've seen Alan Steyne—he's come back!"

The name was written on Judy's heart in letters of flaming hatred, although she had never seen the man himself. Alan Steyne, Chummy's false lover—the deserter, the slayer of Chummy's youth!

"He's come back!" she repeated in a low voice full of furious scorn.

"Yes—I saw him to-day. He was in the Strand, driving a two-seater car. I knew him at once, although he has changed. He is prosperous."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Yes. He remembered me. He pulled up, and we had a chat. He asked after all the old gang. It seems that he's been abroad—traveling."

"Did he ask after—her?"

Judy was white with excitement, making her patches of paint like the cheeks of an old-fashioned Dutch doll.

"No," he answered; "but I mentioned her. He said he was coming to look us up. I asked him to come here to-morrow night. I didn't tell him about Chummy. I simply didn't know how. I only said we were all here just the same; so you'll have to prepare her, Judy. You know, they say joy doesn't kill."

"Of course, they say joy doesn't kill," said Judy to herself many times, when she woke during that night.

The girls had two rooms at the top of a high building in a busy thoroughfare not far from the Café Turc. At least, they had one room and a box of an attic—which latter was Judy's self-chosen portion. Chummy had the room, all the available blankets except one, and whatever comforts the other girl could procure for her.

In many ways Chummy was quite rational, and even endowed with practical sense. She was a good caterer, and could lay out money to the best advantage; but she never asked where the money came from. She accepted her life as it was. She seemed to have lost all memory of the past.

Her mind had gone back to her childhood. She used short words, and was em-

barrasingly frank and candid in her remarks on people's appearance. She never referred to her lost lover directly. Sometimes, when they had been at the Café Turc together, and Judy said it was time to go home, Chummy had gone on reading a newspaper and said:

"No, I'll wait a little longer, Judy. I'm rather expecting somebody."

But that was all. She was very sweet-tempered; she loved the theater; she was restless if she missed going to the café a single day; she had a splendid appetite. On the whole she was easily managed, and she accepted everything that was done for her without question.

Judy doubted whether Chummy remembered that she was Clarissa Morley, or that she had ever lived in another world and had relations and friends who were not perennially impecunious.

Judy shook out her mop of red-gold hair when she had well brushed it. She was perfunctory with her cosmetics this morning, and left her flower face very nearly as God made it.

She found that Chummy had a heavy cold. While she dosed her, and lit a fire out of her scanty stock of fuel, she began her uneasy assault on her friend's dormant memory.

"Chummy, dear, would you be glad to see an old friend again?"

"What friend?" asked the other girl with her lovely, innocent smile.

"A real old friend—some one you were very fond of, old girl!"

"I'm fond of you, Judy, and Bastien and Michael and all the boys," said the deep, bell-like voice.

"I know, but this is somebody you knew long ago. Don't you remember, Chummy? Some one you loved very much." Suddenly she flung her arms round her friend's neck and hugged her. "Some one you loved very, very much!"

"A man?" asked Chummy.

"Yes, a man."

"I love men—I love them very much," said Chummy complacently.

"Yes, but one man—a quite particular boy, you know, not like the others. He's coming back. You'll see him to-night."

"Oh!" said Chummy blankly. "What do you mean?"

Judy gave it up.

During the day she went to Bastien Dumont's attic.

"I can't prepare Chummy," she told him. "She won't take it in. And she's got a vile cold. She can't go to the café to-night. Anyway, I wouldn't let her meet him there, in front of all the boys. I don't know how she'll take it. You must tell him about her, and bring him to see her at our place. You must tell him the best way you can. Of course, as soon as he knows, he'll want to come at once. I'll expect you to-night—about nine. Chummy mustn't be kept up late." She clasped her hands excitedly. "Oh, Bastien, what a wonderful thing! When she sees him, it must all come back to her—it must be all right!"

"I'll do my best," he promised obediently; "but it is a nasty job."

Judy went home and passed a day of feverish excitement. She threw out hint after hint to Chummy, who was quite unresponsive. Even the plainest words did not penetrate the darkness of her mind. Judy spoke then once right out.

"Chummy, your lover—Alan Steyne—has come back. He is coming to see you to-night."

Chummy smiled her baby smile.

At nine o'clock Judy had everything ready. Chummy sat in her chair like a lovely doll. Judy had made the room as clean as she could. There were two brightly-colored shawls pinned on the drab walls. She had recklessly invested in eight pennyworth of yellow jonquils, which brought sunshine into the dingy place. The kettle was singing on the fire.

Listening with all her ears, Judy caught light, hurried footsteps on the stairs. She went out on the landing.

The great moment had arrived.

Judy's face was white in the light of a naked gas-jet. She wore a little black frock, very short in the skirt and sleeves and low in the neck, showing that lovely, innocent curve of throat and shoulder that artists raved about. A string of red beads hung about her waist. Her thin stockings consisted chiefly of darns, and the cheap, exaggerated shoes could not disguise her perfect feet.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs. It seemed to her that they lagged. Dumont appeared first, his companion half a flight behind him.

Judy devoured his appearance with her bright, excited eyes. This was Chummy's young man. How often she had wondered

what he looked like! How often she had wondered at the fidelity of a heart that could be plunged into darkness by the disappearance of any man on earth!

Her mind was too feverish to grasp details. She got an impression of a tall figure and a handsome face, which struck her particularly with its supreme fitness. Alan Steyne looked strong and energetic enough to jump over the moon, she thought. His eyes held hers with a laugh in them—and something else. He was fair, and his face was very tanned. He looked as if he always got what he wanted. Those were Judy's first impressions.

He addressed her in a voice whose naturally careless ring was contradicted by the anxious look in his eyes.

"Miss Grant, do you really think it is wise for me to see Miss Morley to-night? Dumont has told me everything. I am so dreadfully sorry, but—I mean, oughtn't she to be prepared?"

He broke off, looking at her helplessly. Judy shook her head, and the mop of red-gold hair glittered like a bright waterfall.

"It's no good preparing her," she answered quickly. "I've tried and tried. Oh, Mr. Steyne, when she sees you, that'll do the trick all right! Dear old Chummy, I just can't bear it! Will you go in alone?"

He looked frightened.

"Oh, no—please come too. You know, she may—"

"Judy!" came Chummy's voice from inside the room. "Where are you? Why are you such a long time? I'm cold."

Judy went to the half-open door, beckoning to the men to follow her. She saw Alan Steyne close his lips tightly and square his shoulders.

Inside the room Chummy sat in the chair by the small fire. It was the only chair fit for anybody to sit in. She had a pale blue woolen shawl round her shoulders, and it set off her fair loveliness so that she looked like an angel on an old-fashioned Christmas card. Her hair seemed to be made of spun moonbeams, her skin was like a lily-petal flushed by the glow of sunset, and her golden brown eyes were like those of a startled fawn.

"Here is—some one to see you, Chummy, dear," said Judy in a choked voice.

Alan Steyne stood in front of the girl who had lost her wits for love of him. He stood there, awkward and ill at ease, with deep concern in his eyes.

Clarissa Morley smiled up blankly into his face. Then she blew her nose.

After that there was a dreadful pause.

"Say something—speak to her!" commanded Judy in a tense whisper.

"Clarissa!" said Alan Steyne. "Clarissa, don't you know me? I have come back!"

Chummy smiled again. Her eyes dwelt with complacent vacancy on his face—the face that once was all the world to her.

"Handsome boy!" she said sweetly. "I like you. Very handsome boy!"

IV

THE three looked at each other.

"What are we to do?" asked Judy's purple eyes.

"What are we to do?" asked Bastien Dumont's black eyes.

"What am I to do?" asked Alan Steyne's blue eyes.

There was nothing for it. Chummy did not know her lover. To her he was only a handsome boy—one of the many she met and talked to and smiled at every day. Chummy loved men and boys; she always said so with her sweet complacency.

Judy lost her head a little. She flung herself down on her knees by her friend, twined her arms round her, and looked up entreatingly into her face.

"Chummy, darling, don't you know him? It's your own boy—your own particular boy! He's come home! You've been waiting for him all this time, and now he's come! He loves you just the same as ever, and you're going to be happy together ever after! Chummy, you must surely know your own boy!"

There was silence. Alan Steyne's hard breathing could be heard.

Chummy went on smiling, and blew her nose again.

"He's a very handsome boy," she said. "And I like him, but I don't know him, Judy." She looked at the young man and asked inconsequently: "Is it cold out? Won't you come to the fire and have some beef tea?"

Alan Steyne advanced, and Judy pointed to a broken-down basket chair, into which he carefully lowered himself.

"Yes, it is cold," he said. He had one of the nicest voices Judy had ever heard.

"I should love some beef tea. But are you sure you don't remember me, Clarissa? I am Alan. Don't you remember, at the

Café Turc every night? What fun those days were! I was nearly starving—and you painted so beautifully! And we used to walk in Regent's Park, and sometimes we went to Kew, and took our lunch and ate it by the river. Surely you must remember, Clarissa?"

Judy thought what a beautiful name it was. It sounded like a caress as he spoke it. She admired him immensely. His manner was perfect.

Not a trace of enlightenment came into Chummy's face.

"Did you come to the café long ago?" she asked. "I dare say. I knew such lots of boys and men at the café; but I don't know you. I like you. Tell me about yourself while Judy makes the beef tea. Judy, make the beef tea at once!"

Judy went out of the room to fetch cups from a cupboard in her box of an attic. She looked at Dumont as she passed him. Her eyes spoke plainly:

"He can't make love to her while we're there."

Dumont followed her. Chummy and her lover were alone.

They were an unconscionable time fetching the cups and the biscuits. When they came back, Steyne had moved nearer to Chummy, and she was looking more like an angel than ever.

"I like this boy," she said, laughing with a purring sound. "We are going to be great friends."

Steyne shook his head significantly at the other two. Evidently he could not arouse her buried memory.

They drank beef tea and ate biscuits, and smoked and laughed, and nobody would have known that Judy had not enough money in her purse to buy their food on the morrow. It was ten o'clock before Steyne took his leave. Dumont went with him. Chummy smiled radiantly at Alan, and asked him to come again. The other three felt very queer, as if they had spent an hour in an unreal land. Judy dismissed the men with a joke; but she felt very flat and tame as she went back to Chummy.

About ten minutes later Chummy was in bed and asleep, with her flaxen plaits lying like silvery cables on the pillow. Judy shut the door softly and went out upon the landing on her way to her own room. Light, firm footsteps on the stair made her pause, and Steyne ran up, slightly breathless. With one hand he took off his hat, with the

other he drew something from his overcoat pocket.

"I say," he said very rapidly, "I do hope you won't mind, Miss Grant—I mean my coming back; but I wanted—well, Dumont told me about poor Miss Morley, you know—about her condition, and what an angel you've been to her. Of course it isn't fair, and as an old friend of hers I want you to take this—for her, you know, to get her things she wants—nice things to eat, and clothes, and all that. Please do say you're not offended!"

He held out some bank-notes. Judy flushed crimson. She was a regular little Lucifer in her pride, but for Chummy's sake she answered with a spasm of gratitude, clutching at the notes and holding them as if they burned her.

"I mustn't say no, of course. I'm not offended. It's for Chummy, and seeing that you're going to marry her it's only right. Of course, I know it's been rotten for her here. She's not like me or like lots of our little crowd—she's a lady, and all that. I suppose you'll want to take her away at once and put her in some nice place until you're married."

Steyne murmured something more about her goodness to her friend.

"I've done nothing more than any of us would do," Judy answered warmly. "We all love Chummy. We're all Chummy's friends—every one of us."

"And you are her guardian angel, Miss Grant."

"Oh, Lord, no!" said Judy in her queer hoarse voice. "You may call me her guardian, if you like, but there's precious little of the angel about me. Ask those that know me!"

The young man smiled and held out his hand. Judy looked a little abashed as she laid hers in it.

"Good night, little guardian," Alan said. "May we meet soon?"

Judy's hand lay snugly in his close, firm grip. It was only a moment, but it seemed a very, very long time before he released her and turned and went clattering down the stone stairs.

V

THE next day, about noon, Judy and Bastien Dumont met in the Café Turc. Judy had been sitting to the famous Max Dickbread, a rather irritable individual. She was exhausted, and had come for a cup

of coffee and some sandwiches made of Italian sausage that Dan always prepared for her.

Dumont had a glass of beer before him. He said he had lunched—which did not necessarily mean that he had.

"Do you really think he will marry her?" he asked.

"Of course he will marry her!" the girl replied indignantly. "What else could he do? He will pay doctors to make her well, and then he will marry her. If the doctors can't make her well, he will marry her all the same."

"Did he say so?"

"Of course—I mean, it wasn't necessary. He gave me money for her—to spend on nice things. He is going to take her away."

"Did he say so? I don't call that very sporting!"

"Of course he must, Bastien. Why should she stay where she is? He is rich, isn't he?"

"I don't think he's exactly rich, but he's well off. He told me about it. When he left here, he was in despair and half-dotty for lack of food. He made his way to Florence with a man he knew, and thought he might make a living by copying old masters. There he fell in with an old gentleman, a rich art-collector, who took a fancy to him and made him his secretary. They traveled all over the world. The old man died six months ago and left Steyne very comfortably off. I don't think he left him everything he had, but it was quite enough to keep the wolf from the door."

Judy clasped her hands.

"How absolutely gorgeous for Chummy!" she breathed. "And, Bastien, he is awfully nice!"

"Easy enough to be nice when you've got money," grumbled Dumont. "Easy to keep young, too. I'm getting near thirty, Judy, and in a few years I sha'n't be young any more; but there's Alan Steyne, looking like a boy, so fresh and fit—and he's older than I am!"

"Oh, Lord, hark at Methuselah!" cried Judy. "Why, sometimes I feel ninety. Bastien, you silly owl! And sometimes I feel sixteen. Actually I'm twenty-three. That's getting old for a girl, too, you know."

Dumont closed his eyes for a moment with a look of pain. Then he looked at the girl, his face drawn with miserable yearning.

"I wish I could do any kind of work that would make me famous and rich," he said feverishly. "Then perhaps you'd listen to me, Judy. I can't expect you to now, although if you'd only marry me I'd work like a nigger. I'd simply make them take my work and pay for it, and at least you wouldn't have to slave."

Judy shook her head, and her bright hair glittered under her hat.

"I've told you lots of times, Bastien, that I'm never going to marry until I fall in love. Falling in love must be jolly, and it may make it worth while getting married. From what I've seen of marriage it wants something pretty strong to make it worth while!"

A week passed, and Chummy's cold did not get better. She developed a troublesome cough, and her cheeks began to look transparent. Judy was worried, particularly as Alan Steyne did not come again.

Max Dickbread was painting Judy as a Spanish dancer in a sensational work for the Paris Salon, and he changed her pose every day. He was a clever artist, but his personality was devastating. Judy could not have put it into words, but he fed on other people's vitality and reduced her, as she said, to a rag.

Judy went for the doctor. He was a queer Irishman with red hair and fiery eyes. His name was O'Shane, and he ran a dispensary for the poor in Seven Dials.

He was not very encouraging about Chummy. He said she wanted warmth and coddling and plenty of nourishing food.

Judy bought many little delicacies out of Alan Steyne's gift. Dr. O'Shane had attended Chummy before. As he was leaving, he said to Judy on the landing:

"I think her brain's going. She's more childish than she was."

It was that same day that Chummy startled her friend by saying suddenly:

"I feel so queer, Judy! I think something's going to happen to me. It's a horrible feeling, like a lot of brass bands playing in my head!"

Judy sought Dumont. He was her confidant, the one person on whom she could rely. She made him promise to go and see the doctor and tell him all about Chummy.

They met again at the Café Turc in the evening.

"Well?" the girl asked breathlessly.

"O'Shane doesn't think anything could

be done," he answered. "If she didn't know Steyne at once, he doesn't believe she will ever know him. He says there's no treatment that could cure her. He was rather decent—for him; tried to explain the case to me."

Judy was in despair.

"Has Steyne called again?" Dumont asked.

"No."

"Did he say he would?"

"Yes—I mean, Chummy invited him. Oh, Bastien, that night he was so nice to her! I thought him simply perfect. What can be the matter? Why doesn't he come?"

Dumont had no answer. In his own mind he could think of several reasons. He had not Judy's unshakable faith in humanity—which was indeed something to marvel at, considering how much she had seen of life.

Steyne did come a couple of evenings later. He came laden with fruit and flowers, and to Judy he was like a day in spring. His absence was easily accounted for. He had to go to Scotland on business connected with the property his late benefactor had left him.

He came several times that week. Chummy was delighted with him in her placid "take everything for granted" way. She ordered him about just as she did Judy; but not even his repeated visits struck a single chord of her lost memory.

Judy spoke to Steyne about the doctor one night, as he was leaving. Chummy had not been able to go out yet. The two stood on the landing. Chummy's room was only the pretense of a sitting-room, because the bed was hidden behind a rickety screen.

"Don't you think you'd better call in some other doctor?" the girl asked.

There was a note of impatience in her voice. Evidently she was feeling the strain of this unnatural position. Alan Steyne sitting and chatting to Chummy as if they had just met and made friends, and Chummy smilingly unaware that her best-beloved was by her side—it was a spectacle that got on Judy's nerves.

"It's taking such a time!" she went on. "Aren't there better doctors than O'Shane? Can't something be done to make her memory come back and to make her know you? And she's been feeling queer lately. She's told me so. Oh, do something, Mr. Steyne! It must be dreadful for you—this waiting.

It's driving me silly—what must it be doing to you?"

Alan Steyne did not answer immediately. He was looking at Judy. As she gazed at him in her perplexity on behalf of her friend his eyes held hers, and she found herself flushing hotly and angrily as she realized that at that moment the condition of poor Chummy was far from his mind.

She looked away, furious and ashamed at her own embarrassment. Steyne took her hand.

"Good night, little guardian," he said. "Of course, I'll be only too glad to get another opinion, but I'll see this man O'Shane first."

The result was that a famous specialist came to see Chummy, in consultation with the Irish doctor. He did not give much hope. He said just what Dr. O'Shane had said. There was no treatment to be prescribed. It could only be left to nature. It was quite possible that Miss Morley might recover her memory, but there were no means known to science which could accelerate the process.

"So you're just where you were," said Dumont, when Judy told him at the Café Turc on the same night.

"Yes, except that of course Mr. Steyne will take Chummy away now. Her cold's almost well. She wanted to come with me to-night, but I was afraid."

The young artist said nothing.

VI

JUDY saw Steyne the next day. She met him at the entrance to their building, just as she was going out. He said he had come to ask whether she and Miss Morley would go to the theater with him that night. Judy accepted eagerly.

"Chummy'll love that! She's much better. She simply adores the theater; she'd like to go every night. You'll find that out when you're married!"

She stopped suddenly. There was something electric in the atmosphere. She looked up at Steyne and saw that the merry, boyish look had gone from his face. It looked stern, almost hard.

"Miss Grant," he asked with a kind of bald coldness in his voice, "why do you assume that Miss Morley and I are going to be married?"

Judy was too much taken aback to speak. To begin with, Steyne seemed to be angry with her—for what reason she could not

possibly imagine. Then the mere idea of his not marrying Chummy took her breath away.

As she looked at him, she thought his face grew harder still.

"But," she burst out, "aren't you and Chummy going to be married?"

"There is no immediate prospect of it, as you can see," he answered, speaking in an almost hostile tone, which hurt her, although she did not know why. "And when you assume it in front of other people—Dumont, for instance—it makes it very awkward for me. Moreover, it is hardly fair to Miss Morley."

"Not fair to Chummy!" Judy cried. She was almost inarticulate. To an outsider she might have appeared comic in her surprise. "But Chummy loves you with her whole heart and soul. She has loved you all these years. It is because of you that she is what she is—because you went away and left her. Oh, what can you mean?"

Steyne moved into the big doorway of the building, and she followed him. People were passing constantly. It was no place for such a discussion, but there was no other available.

In the young man's face was a determination to get something over which he knew would be very unpleasant. No man likes to look a cad, particularly in the eyes of such a passionate little loyalist as Judy Grant.

"Miss Grant," he said, "it is very painful for me to have to say this, but I must, or else I should be sailing under false colors. I am dreadfully sorry about Miss Morley, but you must see that at present the idea of marriage in her case is unthinkable. And if she recovered, how do you know that she would have—even feelings of friendship toward me?"

"Feelings of friendship!" repeated Judy. "Oh, how can you? If she knew you again, it would be with all her old love—of course it would! How can you think anything else?"

"In those circumstances it would be different," Steyne remarked quietly. "If, as you say, I have the misfortune to be in a way responsible for Miss Morley's present condition—"

"I say so!" interrupted Judy indignantly. "Everybody says so. Ask anybody—Bastien Dumont, Michael Stone, Tony Leigh—any of them! When you left, she

broke her poor heart. She had nothing left to live for. She just waited for you to come back, and you didn't come. Then she fell ill and nearly died, and when she got better she was—what she is now. Everybody knew that it was for love of you!" Judy broke off with a sob in her throat.

Steyne's eyes were fixed on Judy's face beneath her shabby hat—that little flower face so lovely despite the cheap vulgarity of its make-up. The single-hearted loyalty blazing in the big purple eyes, the laughing lips trembling over poor Chummy's sorrows—they seemed to affect him strangely. He was pale under his tan, and for a moment or two he did not speak.

"Why," Judy went on, her voice still quivering, "I thought, when I heard you had come back, that it would be all right, that you would take Chummy away and marry her at once, and spend all your life in trying to make up to her—poor darling Chummy!"

The young man's face hardened again.

"Miss Grant," he said, "if Miss Morley were to recover, and if she really had feelings such as you describe toward me, I suppose I should be in honor bound to ask her to be my wife; but that, unfortunately, does not seem to be at all probable. The specialist and Dr. O'Shane both give little hope. They talk of what they call 'permanently enfeebled vitality,' and say that in all practical things she is like a child."

"But they do say she might get better," protested Judy. "And, oh, I am bitterly disappointed! I considered you were engaged to her. Do you think I would have taken that money from you? And now I've spent it. And you never meant anything at all!"

Steyne flushed.

"As to the money, don't think about that, Miss Grant," he said. "As an old friend, I am entitled to help Miss Morley. It is a privilege; but you have been misinformed about our relations. We never were engaged to be married. Any such idea would have been ridiculous. I was practically starving. She had quarreled with her relatives, and was living on a pittance. We were very good friends. I was awfully fond of her. She was one of the brightest girls I ever met, and very clever; but there was never any talk of marriage. We were awfully sympathetic. I admired her no end, and loved her—yes, loved her in a way—as we all did. I knew she was fond

of me, of course; but I never knew, I never dreamed, that she would take it so much to heart!"

Judy made no reply. Her big eyes were startled.

"I do hope you'll forgive me for saying all this," the young man added in a low voice, in which shame mingled with eagerness. "I know it all sounds horrible; but it's the truth, and—I wanted you to know."

Still Judy was silent. She did not doubt Alan. Indeed, she knew that he spoke the truth; but it was all so utterly different from the tragedy with which she had been living. It made it an even worse tragedy.

"Then you don't love Chummy—not like a sweetheart?"

"No," he answered; "but I do care a great deal for her, and I want to help her all I can."

"You don't love her?" Judy said as if to herself.

"Miss Grant, I was only a boy. All that part of my life seems like a dream now."

"Oh, poor Chummy!" cried Judy, in a burst of passion. "I almost hope she never gets well!"

There was a pause. Then Steyne asked in his ordinary voice:

"You will come to the play to-night?"

"No—no! How can we?"

"But you say Miss Morley enjoys it so much. Honestly, doesn't she seem quite happy?"

"But it's a sham!"

"Are you sure? She likes me as a friend. She loves the theater. It can do no harm."

"All right," agreed Judy half-sullenly.

"I don't want Chummy to miss a treat; and I must come along, because you mightn't know how to manage her."

"I'll call for you at seven sharp, and we'll dine at Ticino's, shall we?"

"Chummy would love that."

"All right, then; and—please forgive me, Miss Grant!"

Her eyes dropped before his.

"I don't suppose there's anything to forgive," she muttered. "I just thought you were another kind of man, and that it was all coming right for Chummy. It's a bit of a blow!"

VII

CHUMMY made no actual progress toward recovery, but she no longer complained of feeling queer. One thing was noticeable, at any rate—she was decidedly

more animated, though she looked very frail. Without doubt, Alan Steyne's companionship had much to do with it. He constantly took the two girls out, and people observing them remarked on what a happy trio they were.

Steyne's small fortune was pleasantly unencumbered. He had no business to attend to. Now and then he said he must stop idling, and thought he would take up painting again; but he did not do so.

"I really never could paint," he once said to Judy, when they were alone. "I only imagined I was meant to be an artist."

"Chummy could," the girl retorted. She always talked about her friend.

"Yes, she had real talent—I think more than talent," he admitted. "It was a great shame!"

By now she had tacitly granted that Alan had spoken the truth. They were ostensibly very good friends, but when they happened to be alone he felt a certain smoldering hostility. She could see that Chummy had not the faintest idea of his identity, not the remotest thought of marriage with him; but she still felt that he ought to have claimed her immediately and made her his wife. That, Judy felt, was the only suitable and picturesque culmination of the strange romance.

Once Judy caught Alan looking at her, and she quickly turned away. Something dawned upon her. She would not have been a woman if the knowledge had not come to her; and she was terrified.

That night she slept badly. Steyne's face was always before her, with that something behind the laughter in his eyes—something that thrilled her and made her afraid.

A week later Alan came into the Café Turc, where Judy was eating her sausage sandwich after another exhausting morning with Max Dickbread.

"I say, will you have dinner with me to-night and go to a show?" he asked eagerly.

"Can't," the girl replied. "Chummy's got another cold—a bad one."

"Oh, but couldn't you come alone?" His voice was a little more eager still. "It's my birthday."

"I couldn't leave Chummy," she said.

"But couldn't you get some one to stay with her? There's that nice girl in your building—"

"Clara Jenks!" Judy's voice trembled a little. She was struggling between desire

and a sense of duty. "Well, I dare say she would stay with Chummy. She's out of a job just now. But—"

"Don't make any difficulties, please! You like a music-hall, don't you? I'll call for you at seven sharp."

"But I oughtn't to, Mr. Steyne."

"Of course you ought! You know Chummy would want you to have a good time, little guardian. I won't take no!"

Judy heaved several sighs as she went up the last of the seven flights to Chummy's room. On the way she had called on Clara Jenks, and had asked her if she would sit with Chummy and get her some supper. Clara agreed with alacrity. She was the soul of good nature—a struggling artist, a born comédienne who never got a part that suited her. At the moment she was out of work.

Judy then told Chummy of the invitation. Chummy was delighted, and said that of course Judy must go.

"He wanted you to go, too," Judy replied emphatically. "We sha'n't have half such a good time, Chummy, darling!"

She hugged her friend. Chummy was very hot, and said she wanted to sleep.

Judy ran out and bought things for her supper. An uneasy conscience made her spend more than she could afford. She bought oranges and some French cream buns that Chummy was particularly fond of, and a bunch of Parma violets. She wanted a pair of gloves badly, but she did not buy them.

She felt feverish herself. Her heart beat very fast and loud. It was the first time she had ever known that she had a heart. Her conscience was troublesome, too. She knew that she wanted to go to dinner and a show with Alan Steyne more than she had ever wanted to do anything in all her life; and she was glad that Chummy had a cold!

When the time came to dress, she stood before her cheap, distorting mirror, and the flush on her cheeks after she had washed her face prevented her from putting on any more paint. The stick of lip-salve was taken up and then laid down again. She just dusted her hot face with powder. She felt as if she were going to cry any moment, so she left her eyelashes alone.

It was all instinctive. Judy was easily excited, and that strange flutter in her breast was a new sensation.

She had only one dress suitable for such an occasion. It had belonged to Max Dick-

bread's sister. He had painted Judy in it, and had told her to keep it. It was golden, with a gorgeous sash of flame and emerald. The neck was cut round, and it had tiny sleeves of gold lace. Above each ear Judy fastened a flame-colored velvet poppy.

Over her dress she threw a black velvet cloak of rather tawdry material, but made in a fashionable shape. Her only pair of white gloves were soiled, so she carried them in her hands.

She went in to be admired by Chummy. Steyne ran up the stairs, punctual to the moment. He greeted Chummy, and they went off immediately.

They dined at a smart restaurant where Judy had never been before. It was a real gala night. There were violets on the table, and they drank champagne. The lights were shaded with some blue stuff that looked like the sky. The women wore wonderful clothes. At the table next to them a white-haired woman, with black eyes and a rose-petal skin, was wearing some pearls that made Judy's big eyes nearly start out of her head.

At first the girl's thoughts were all with the absent Chummy; but gradually, under the influence of the food and the wine and the soft music, Chummy's image faded, and the luxurious surroundings all seemed to merge into the handsome face and the laughing eyes on the other side of the small table. She had little consciousness of what they talked about. She knew that it was delightful talk—rather silly, probably, but it made a glow round her heart.

Then it was time to go on to the music-hall. Steyne gathered up the violets on the table and gave them to her. As they passed out of the restaurant he said, with a touch of shyness in his low voice:

"I say, you are looking most awfully well to-night!"

As she put on her cloak, Judy looked at herself in a mirror. Her own face looked strange to her. She certainly needed neither paint nor powder, and there was a starry shine in her eyes that had never been there before. She was no longer gaudy, like a dyed narcissus.

In the lobby, as they were waiting for a cab, a big man stared hard at Judy. Then he bowed, smiled, and fixed his small, pale eyes admiringly on her. Something in his look made her flush, and she gave him a curt nod of recognition.

"Who's that fellow?" Steyne asked with

unconcealed disgust. "What a hideous brute!"

"I've forgotten his name," the girl answered; "but he's some rich man. He came to the café one night with Vincent Stornaway, the artist. It was awfully funny—Chummy told him he was an ugly man, and said he was like Punch. He was a sport about it, though—didn't seem to mind a bit."

The music-hall performance passed like a dream. Judy, sitting in one of the best boxes, felt like a queen. Steyne sat a little behind her. They talked and laughed like children.

Judy gave a great sigh when it was all over. They drove back in a cab. She had a key to open the big doors with. Alan used it, and they stepped into the house. He had dismissed the cab, saying that he would walk home.

"Oh, I've had such a lovely time!" Judy said with a catch in her voice. "It is good of you. I don't know when I've enjoyed myself so much."

There was one gas-jet burning low to illuminate the cavernous-looking stone staircase. At the foot of it she turned and held out her hand.

Steyne took it, muttered something almost inarticulate, and turned away; but the next moment he was back. Judy was crushed in his arms, and he was kissing her eyes, her hair, her lips—which met his with an irresistible response.

"Judy, little Judy!" he whispered triumphantly. "I love you—I love you! And you love me!"

She tore herself away. She was as white as death.

"You mustn't!" she gasped. "You mustn't! Oh, how could I let you? You can't love me—you mustn't love me! You belong to Chummy. Do you think I'd steal you from my pal?"

And just then, while the two stood facing each other, trembling with the reaction from that moment of irresistible passion, there came quick footsteps flying down the stairs, and the voice of Clara Jenks cried breathlessly:

"Is that you, Judy? What a relief! Such a dreadful thing has happened—Chummy's been taken frightfully ill! Dr. O'Shane is up there now. He doesn't think she'll live through the night."

Judy forgot all about Alan Steyne. She forgot all about everything. She was up

the stairs like a streak of lightning. She never answered Clara. She could only take in that Chummy was ill—desperately ill. And she had been out enjoying herself! She had been having that wonderful time, lost in her dream of unreal delight!

She felt like a traitor. The feeling was so violent that her skin tingled with it.

Dr. O'Shane was on their landing, and Clara Jenks came up-stairs again. The doctor's fiery face was grave.

"It's pneumonia," he said. "I hope we'll pull her through. I've a nurse on the way. No, Miss Judy, you'd never be able to do it. She must have skilled attention. She'll get a bit of sleep—I've seen to that; and I'll be in early in the morning."

Judy pulled his sleeve, and as she did so Alan Steyne's violets fell from her hands, a poor, withered bunch. She did not notice them, although a few minutes ago the young man's arms had crushed them against her breast in that embrace which now was to her such a monstrous sin.

"Don't say she'll die!" she pleaded hoarsely. "I couldn't bear it!"

The doctor looked at her with the Irishman's quick response to emotion.

"We'll do all we can, Miss Judy," he said. "You must be hoping all the time."

He had to hurry away. Judy went into Chummy's room, and looked distractedly at the restless figure with the changed face and the burning eyes of high fever. She felt utterly hopeless, and went out again to the landing to wait for the nurse.

"I never had such a fright in my life," Clara Jenks informed her. "What do you think? I'd given her her supper and gone to my room for a minute or two, and when I came back she was gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Judy.

"Yes," said Clara. "She must have been light-headed all the time. Luckily I thought of the café, and followed her; and there she was, drinking vermouth and smoking. Bastien Dumont brought her back for me, and in an hour I saw there was something wrong; so I sent Bastien for O'Shane. Bastien was awfully good!"

Judy gave a groan. Chummy out, all alone, on a cold night like that!

The nurse arrived and went into the patient's room. Clara returned to her own quarters. Judy was just going to hers, to get into a dressing-gown, when she heard a man's voice calling softly up the staircase:

"Judy—Miss Grant—may I come up?"

She stood irresolute for a moment, and then ran down. She met Alan Steyne on the third landing.

"Haven't you gone?" she asked.

"No. How could I—without knowing? How is she?"

Judy was just on the point of hysteria. "She may die to-night!" she whispered in passionate self-accusation. "I dare say she will, and it 'll be my fault for leaving her—and your fault! I hate you—I never want to see you again! Chummy's dying—and we've been having a good time!"

Choking with sobs, she ran up the dark stairs again, leaving Alan to make his way out of the house.

VIII

CHUMMY came very near to death. She was so ill that one night Dr. O'Shane spent five hours in her room. She was delirious that night, and her high-pitched chatter seemed to fill the building. There was no deep, bell-like sound in that thin, restless voice.

Judy spent most of the time on the landing, and often Clara Jenks joined her. Clara could not help looking on the funny side of things, and she made Judy laugh in the midst of her misery—which was a very good thing.

Judy did not go much into her friend's room. At first Dr. O'Shane would not let her do so, and afterward she felt a reluctance that had its roots in the memory of Alan Steyne's embrace at the foot of the stairs. She did not know how she was ever going to face Chummy again. She had thought herself sick about that night, picturing Chummy, light-headed and burning with fever, instinctively making her way to the Café Turc, seeking the place where was enshrined all she had ever known of happiness and love.

Before the end of the week the crisis was over, and care, nourishment, and rest were all that Chummy required.

"She has a much stronger constitution than I should have thought," said Dr. O'Shane. "When she picks up, she'll be all right again; but, Miss Judy, it's yourself I'll have to be prescribing for next. You're looking altogether too much like a snowdrop—though, sure, there's no fault to be found with the little flower itself."

Judy was a very bad housekeeper, and Clara Jenks had taken it on herself to buy food and other necessities for her. Judy

handed over her purse with a sigh of relief; but she was forced to realize, in a day or two, that the luxuries and delicacies that Clara provided could not possibly have come out of that slender store.

She taxed Clara with it on the day after Chummy finally turned the corner and began to struggle back to life.

"Clara, you're spending your own money on us! But, no, you haven't got any, I'm sure. Clara, where are you getting money from?" A suspicion that was a practical certainty made Judy flush and frown. "Is it Mr. Steyne?" she cried excitedly. "You're not taking money from him, Clara, are you?"

Clara confessed that she was.

"I thought it was all right," she said, with her quaint blunt face screwed up into an expression of contrite surprise. "He said he was an old friend."

"Where have you seen him?" asked Judy's accusing voice.

"Why, he came to inquire—twice. I don't know where you were—oh, yesterday you were out for a walk with Bastien! He was awfully anxious about Chummy, and I didn't like to refuse."

"How much, Clara?"

"A fiver he gave me yesterday."

"You mustn't take any more. Promise! I'll get some money. Of course, Chummy must have everything."

"Oh, how splendid that she's getting better!" cried Clara.

She proceeded to execute a weird, shuffling dance, so comic that it would have brought down the house if she had performed it on a stage. Judy laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks.

All that morning her thoughts were busy with Alan Steyne as she posed for Max Dickbread's Spanish dancer in her vivid yellow and black dress, with immense scarlet poppies under the lace mantilla that covered her flaming hair. She had not seen Alan since that night. Of course, when Chummy was well again, she would have to. He must come to see Chummy. He had said he was fond of her. He must be. Everybody was. Those brief moments at the foot of the staircase had been madness. No doubt he regretted them bitterly.

Judy was an incredible optimist, but she had at the same time no very high opinion of men. She had seen too much of them.

The dinner, the lights, the wine, the music—and those laughing eyes! Was Alan

Steyne really in love with her? She did not believe it for a minute. Was she in love with him? She pulled a little shutter down over her thoughts, and would not answer that question at all.

In the early afternoon she went to Vincent Stornaway's house in Kensington. The artist had written to her, asking if she would sit to him for the head and shoulders of Queen Elizabeth as a young girl. He had for the moment abandoned portrait-painting, and was engaged on a large historical panel for the new Royal Exchange in Dunchester, the great commercial city of the Midlands.

Judy could not afford to turn down any offer of work, particularly at this moment; and she could not help feeling a little flattered. Stornaway had never asked her to sit to him before. In his letter he referred to her hair and her eyebrows as suggesting to him the coloring and lineaments of the young princess. The interview that resulted was satisfactory, and it was arranged that she should go to him when Max Dickbread could spare her.

Stornaway proved restful after her tyrannical genius. He talked to her kindly, and gave her tea. As she left his house—a large, low, many-windowed building of red brick, which suggested the country—she fed her eyes on the snowdrops that spread a field of gleaming whiteness over the lawns on either side of the path. The grounds were enclosed by a high wall that had a gate set in it, and as she opened the gate a man met her.

She recognized him with an inward grin. She did not know why, but even the thought of him made her laugh. It was Bruce Gideon, white and heavy-jawed, with pale eyes, black hair, and peevish mouth. Chummy's description of him as Punch came back to her. He wore correct afternoon dress, which made him look old-fashioned. A shining top-hat was on his big head.

At sight of Judy his lips opened in a smile which chased the peevish look from his face, but brought out its coarseness.

"Do you remember me, Miss Judy?" he asked, holding out his hand.

Judy, glad of her new work, and still rejoicing in Chummy's escape from death, answered gladly:

"Of course I remember you, Mr. Punch!"

"And here comes dog Toby!" Gideon went on, as Stornaway's terrier came trot-

ting down the paved path. "Now we can give our show!" His little eyes rested on her glowing face with a covetous gaze that made her draw back into her shell.

"And how is your friend who called me Mr. Punch—the beautiful girl with the sad story?"

"Who told you her story?" Judy asked.

"Stornaway," replied Gideon. "He knew her, it seems."

"She has nearly died," Judy said. "And her young man has come back."

"Ah! Then I suppose there will be a happy ending?"

"Yes," said Judy faintly, "there will be a happy ending."

In her heart she meant that there must be a happy ending. Alan Steyne would recover from his madness. All would be well with Chummy.

"I wonder would you dine with me to-night?" Gideon went on.

"No, thanks."

"Will you lunch with me to-morrow?"

"No, thanks."

"I mean—I will ask any one else you like."

"No, thanks."

"When your friend is well again—then, perhaps?"

"If it would amuse her," said Judy, with cool scorn.

"I shall make it my business, then, to amuse her."

"You are ridiculous, Mr. Punch!" She glanced at him with the same feeling that had often made her lay her little hand like a snowflake on Bastien Dumont's arm; only there was less kindness in her eyes. A single drop of water would quench Bastien's generous ardor; this man needed a garden hose. "Please let me pass!" she added.

"*Au revoir*, Miss Judy," he said, his eyes traveling from her shabby hat to her perfect feet.

"Good-by, Mr. Punch," she answered without a further look.

When she got back, she went into Chummy's room. The nurse had gone out for a while. Chummy was lying on her pillows in the soft luxury of convalescence. She smiled her baby smile as Judy came up to her bed and bent over her.

And Judy knew at once that something tremendous had happened.

"Oh, Judy," said Chummy's low, lazy voice, "what do you think? I was dying

to tell somebody. I dreamed that Alan had come back!"

IX

It was a miracle. Judy could hardly believe her eyes or her ears. Chummy had mentioned Alan Steyne's name. She had spoken it for the first time since Judy had known her.

Moreover, there was a difference in her face. Something had come into it that Judy had never seen—a brightness, a shining beauty, which made it look in its frail pallor as if it were illumined by a flame from within.

Judy could only marvel as she hung over the bed. Chummy's memory had come back! This illness had been a blessing in disguise.

Judy was beside herself with excitement. Only the instinct of her loyal little heart made her say and do the right thing. She might have made irremediable mistakes in those first moments; but she just listened to Chummy's voice, with that new note in it—the tender note of the woman talking about the man she loves.

"You never knew Alan, did you, Judy? It is funny I should have dreamed about him just now. Something queer must have happened to me. I seem to have forgotten a lot of things. He went away long ago—I think it was long ago. We were awfully poor, you know. He was wonderfully clever, but he never got on; and he couldn't wait, you see. It's awfully hard waiting—when you're a man."

"Oh, Chummy, and this—this was your own particular boy?" asked Judy in a trembling voice.

"I was awfully fond of him, Judy, and—I think he was awfully fond of me," said the low, rich voice; "but I never heard from him. I think I must have forgotten him for quite a time, but just now I had this dream, and it was so clear and real! Alan looked quite different, and so much better and stronger, but it was Alan, and he had come back."

"I expect that means he will, Chummy," said Judy decidedly. "I always thought there was a lot in dreams; but now you go to sleep, or you'll be getting tired. If your young man's coming back, you must be quite well and strong."

Chummy turned on her pillow and looked at her friend.

"Judy, tell me, is there anything the

matter with me?" she asked in a voice of utter bewilderment. "I really do feel queer. Do I look any—any different?"

Judy laughed merrily.

"Well, you look prettier than ever I saw you, darling! I call it worth while being ill. Perhaps you had lost your memory a bit—such funny things happen!—and it's coming back to you all of a sudden; but don't worry, whatever you do. Go to sleep now and dream about your Alan again, and I'll make you some tea."

Chummy seemed to be satisfied. She was still very weak, and she fell into a comfortable doze.

Judy went to make the tea over the gas-ring in her box of an attic. While the kettle came to the boil, she stood lost in profound thought.

Chummy's memory had come back! A picture rose before Judy's mind of the night when Alan Steyne had really returned—when Chummy had smiled her baby smile at him, had looked at him without recognition, and, with complacent vacancy, had called him a handsome boy and a nice boy.

When Chummy was strong again, she would be like everybody else. The next time she saw Alan Steyne she would know him. Judy was overjoyed. No personal consideration would ever disturb her loyalty to her friend.

Alan Steyne was Chummy's property. Now that she would know him, and still loved him, he must prove his faith and marry her at once. Through her brain, filled with the mists of forgetfulness, his image had already struggled, though she believed she had seen him only in a dream.

Judy's next thought was to consult Dr. O'Shane. The nurse had come back, and Chummy was settled for the night. Judy saw the doctor in his surgery. She told him her great news, and he expressed approval of her conduct. Nothing must be hurried, he said. Something had happened during Chummy's illness to break down the blank wall of forgetfulness.

Judy went on to the Café Turc. Dan, the long, lean waiter with the face of a Roman emperor and the sunny tenor voice, was the first person to whom she imparted her splendid news.

"Dan, Miss Morley is ever so much better. And what do you think?—she's got her memory back again! When you see her again she'll be her old self, just like you and me!"

Bastien Dumont was late in looking in that night. Judy had almost given him up, and she was frowning with the irritation of having to bottle up her feelings—which, after all, Bastien would understand better than any one else, because he was Chummy's oldest friend among the crowd.

When she told him, she threw it at him like a bomb.

"Chummy's got her memory back, Bastien. She dreamed Alan Steyne had come back; and she looks—well, I can't tell you how she looks. I never saw any one like her! So now, you see, it's going to be all right. They'll meet, and Chummy will know him, and they'll be married and live happily ever after!"

Bastien's eyes kindled as they rested on her eager face. He had been nursing miserable, jealous thoughts about Steyne lately. He had seen Judy with him; he knew that they had been out together the night that Chummy was taken ill. There could be nothing in it, after all. Judy could never talk like this if she had a spark of feeling for Steyne herself.

He expressed his delight, and drank to Chummy's health. Then he said:

"I saw Steyne this afternoon. He is going over to Paris to-night."

"To Paris!"

"Yes—some business or other. This old collector he was secretary to left some pictures to the Louvre and the Luxembourg, and there's some dispute that Steyne has to settle."

"It's a good thing," Judy said. "I do want Chummy to be quite well when she sees him again. Of course, he's been inquiring for her, and it would be difficult to have to explain it all. Oh, Bastien, isn't it wonderful?"

But the young man's face was gloomy.

"You can take enough interest in other people's love-affairs," Bastien said. "Oh, Judy, you'll drive me mad!"

"Don't be absurd, Bastien," she answered, with the straight, kind look that she always had for him. "Let me tell you a discovery I've made, old boy. Clara Jenks is crazy about you!"

He gave an impatient exclamation, which caused the girl to continue with a touch of mischief:

"It's perfectly true, Bastien. I tell you that girl's a duck and a brick, and one of the very best; and, mark my words, one day she'll be a star. Any one who could

make me laugh as she did while Chummy lay dying is simply bound to be famous! And yet all the time her heart was bursting with misery, just like mine. Bastien, if Clara loves you as much as I think she does, you're a lucky chap—indeed you are!"

"Judy, stop it!" was all he answered. "You're mocking me."

It was February—a soft day of mist and sudden warmth with just a shimmer of green upon the trees in the parks and squares, as if carelessly brushed on, but by an unerring hand.

Judy stood with Alan Steyne in Chummy's room, which was furnished up as far as their slender resources allowed, and bright with spring flowers, contributed almost blossom by blossom by the "boys" of the Café Turc as tokens of their joy at Chummy's recovery.

"Chummy's out," Judy said. "She is quite well again, and her memory has come back. I tried to write to tell you in Paris, but it was too difficult. She dreamed about you first, but it must have been in her mind that she had seen you. She—she loves you awfully. O'Shane told me I wasn't to hurry her memory; but I've been telling her that I believe in dreams, and I know she thinks you're coming back."

Steyne looked perplexed and troubled.

"Judy," he said, "it is no good. It's only asking for trouble. It's much better to let her know at once that I never cared for her like that. Judy, you know it's no good!"

Suddenly he stopped. There were footsteps outside. Judy had said that Chummy was out and would not come back until late. She was meeting a relative with whom she had communicated since her recovery. Judy had made the appointment with Alan on purpose to tell him.

The door opened. He gave one terrified look at the figure that entered. It was Chummy—the Chummy of the old days, hardly aged by a minute—a wonderful vision, like some delicate statuette wrought in silver and ivory and gold.

She saw him and stood quite still for a moment. Then, with a cry, and straight and swift as an arrow speeding from a bow, she ran into his arms.

X

JUDY took one look at Alan Steyne's face and fled. She went into her own room and

stood under the little window set high in the slanting roof. Her emotions were too many and too complex for her to analyze them; but she was sure that foremost among them was joy because Chummy was herself again, and because she was so lovely, so irresistible, that Alan must fall in love with her now, if he had not done so before. Chummy was going to be happy; and Chummy's happiness had been Judy's chief concern for years.

But, as she stood there, her face set and pale under the patches of paint, her lips trembled a little. Her thoughts leaped involuntarily back to that one perfect night of the dinner and the music-hall and the violets, and tears that she struggled to keep back made her eyes smart and tingle.

Chummy put her head in at the door.

"Judy, what are you doing? Come along. You've been away ages and ages!"

Judy smiled into the transfigured face with the silver flaxen hair and the golden brown eyes that were so wonderful since they had lost their vacant look. She followed her friend into the other room. The thing had to be done.

She did not look directly at Alan, although she spoke to him in her gay, hoarse voice.

"Well, this is a great day, isn't it, Mr. Steyne?"

"Judy," put in Chummy excitedly, "did you know that Alan was coming back? It's all so wonderful—just like a fairy tale!"

"A little bird whispered something about it," the other girl answered, laughing. "You know I didn't expect you back so early to-day. I was preparing Mr. Steyne, you see—telling him he mustn't startle you, because you'd been ill."

She was looking at her friend, taking in the change that was more startling than ever to-day. Besides the returned intelligence and vivacity, she saw the flush and glow of love. This new Chummy was wholly given over to the tremendous emotion that she had nourished so faithfully, if unconsciously, all these years.

Judy forced herself to look at Alan Steyne. He was playing his part, if a part it really were. There was nothing to show that he was not overjoyed. Men are not expected to show emotion like women—not even artists.

"Alan has been telling me all about his travels, Judy," said the deep, bell-like voice, now as charged with color as the lovely face

was with life. "I can hardly believe it's so long since he went away; but it's splendid to think that he's had such a wonderful time!"

Judy was uncertain how to answer, so she gave her friend a hug and said gently:

"You see, Chummy, dear, dreams do come true. Well, and when are you going to get married?"

"Oh, Judy!" exclaimed Chummy, rosy with shyness. "We haven't thought of such a thing yet. It's just enough that Alan is back!"

She had gained since her recovery, among other qualities that surprised Judy into wondering admiration, a reserve that she had never displayed in her childish state. The younger girl felt her friend withdrawing herself into realms where she could not follow. There were dignity and authority about her. There were many other things, too, that Judy would never understand—stores of knowledge in a well-trained mind that were drawn on once more by the revived intelligence, and the desire for books, and the appreciative sensibilities of the artist directed upon every subject in nature and human life.

To Judy's surprise, everything in the world was beautiful to Chummy now. She had been told that her friend was a very clever girl before the illness that caused the long clouding of her mind; but she had not understood what was meant by that. She now recognized a truly brilliant intelligence, and felt herself deeply inferior.

After the first embarrassment at Judy's question about their marriage, Chummy suddenly became self-possessed. Her beautiful face went grave and quiet, and she looked at her friend, as Judy put it, "as if she had suddenly gone to live in the next street."

"Judy," she said, "I want you to tell Alan about me—I mean about my losing my memory, and being ill, and all that. Somehow, when I try to tell him, I can't find the words; but I want him to know. I still feel rather queer about it, almost as if I'd been born all over again."

Judy looked at Alan and poured out jerky sentences in a great hurry.

"I wasn't there at the start, Mr. Steyne," she said; "but I believe that soon after you went away Chummy was very ill, and when she got better she'd lost her memory. She was well and strong again, but she just didn't remember anything about that time."

And that's all there is to it. Then, the other day, when she had pneumonia and nearly died, her memory came back."

"But, Judy, how did I live?" interrupted Chummy, with a puzzled air. "My old aunt I went to see to-day asked me that. I don't think I had any money."

"Oh, yes, you had," said her friend. "It lasted a long time," she added vaguely. "There wasn't much to spend it on."

"But now, Judy!"

Chummy's golden brown eyes compelled an answer.

"Oh, that's all right—everybody at the café loves you, so, Chummy, dear. They were only too pleased to—"

"You mean that I've been living on charity?" asked Chummy, with a touch of proud revolt.

At this Judy flared up.

"If you call it charity when a lot of people adore you, and would do anything in the world to keep you well and happy, and simply gloat over every little thing they can do for you! I call it something else."

A very humble look came into Chummy's proud face. In the years of her mental stagnation she had acquired a certain way of ordering people about and taking things for granted that was not natural to her.

"Oh, Judy," she whispered, "how wonderful you've all been to me! I'm beginning to understand. I must have been quite helpless and like a child. I suppose I wasn't mad?" she added anxiously.

"Of course not!" was the emphatic answer. "What an idea! And now that you're well again, everything will be all right. You can work, and we'll all be happy and jolly as the day is long!"

"Yes," Chummy said. "I believe I can work again—now."

Her eyes rested for a moment on Alan Steyne's face. The young man rose to go.

"What about the café to-night?" Judy asked. "I've almost promised to take Chummy there. She hasn't been there since her illness, you know, and the boys are mad to see her again. Chummy"—she looked at the other girl with a touch of anxiety—"do you remember all the boys—Tony Leigh and Michael Stone and Johnny Plarmel, and all the others?"

"Yes, I remember them, of course," Chummy replied; "but it seems a very long time ago. Tony Leigh did wonderful caricatures, and Michael Stone painted that

glorious 'Venus Quarreling with Adonis' that the Academy turned down and the Paris Salon hung on the line."

Judy shook her head in bewilderment.

"Clarissa," interposed Alan, with the most perfect assumption of nonchalance, "you're mixing up dates. That was seven years ago, before you knew Miss Grant."

"Oh, yes, I dare say," Chummy said. "I do remember them, and I know I've seen them many times, but it's all very vague. The time when—when you were there is much clearer to me."

Judy gave a sad little laugh.

"They're all the same in one way, Chummy—they're failures, every one of them, according to the world. The only one who did anything at all was Vincent Stornaway, who simply gave up trying, and now paints millionaires and their wives. His women are all satin and diamonds, and, as he says, he manages to make them look just a little bit naughty. He makes ten thousand a year, but he hardly ever comes to the café. Well," she added, looking from one to the other, "what about to-night?"

"It will be lovely!" said Chummy. "I'm simply dying to see them all again."

"Of course," put in Alan. "Clarissa must go and see all her friends. What time shall we meet?"

Judy named the hour. As the young man left the room, he held out his hand. She had to put hers in it, and she knew from the swift look he gave her that it was not because of Chummy that he would be at the Café Turc that night.

XI

MISS MORLEY, the aunt with whom Chummy had communicated since her recovery, had invited her niece to go to the Italian Riviera with her, but Chummy had declined. She was quite strong, and, since Alan had come back, she was itching to get to her long-neglected work again. Everybody told her that she could paint, Alan included; and she had the feeling that to get to work would complete the reconstruction of her life.

Chummy had gone to spend Miss Morley's last day in England with her at her hotel, and Alan Steyne, knowing of it, came to find Judy just before lunch-time. She was just about to go to the café.

"Come to lunch with me, please," he said. "We'll go somewhere where we can talk."

This was the second day after the evening at the café, where Chummy had had a reception that might easily have paralyzed a queen used to the adulation of her subjects.

"Oh!" said Judy, with her purple eyes fixed anxiously on Alan. "I don't know. What is it you want to talk about?"

"You," he said boldly.

He had a very determined look on his face, and she gave in with a sigh.

"You are making it awfully difficult," she said.

They went to one of the big restaurants, where, as Alan said, they would be lost.

Judy wanted no food. She played with what Alan ordered, and tapped her little fingers on the table in time to the music of a noisy band. Her face met his eyes, tense with the inflexible spirit that was stronger than any human desire.

"We must have it out," he said.

"I don't understand you," she answered.

"Chummy loves you just the same as ever."

"But I don't love her."

"I hate you when you say that!" said Judy. "How can you help loving such a girl as Chummy? She's not only perfectly lovely, but she knows oceans and oceans of things. She belongs to another world than mine."

"The world you belong to is good enough for me, Judy," said Alan, setting his teeth. "You're driving me crazy!"

"But," she said with transparent simplicity, "you must have seen that everybody knows you belong to her. Think of the boys at the café! It was just like some one coming home when you came; and only a few of them had really known you. And"—she ended with her unanswerable statement—"and Chummy has been waiting for you all these years."

He looked at her moodily.

"All these years these fellows and you kept up a pretense—a kind of legend," he said. "You didn't really know. It's an atmosphere you've made, and I have to suffer for it."

"But Chummy loves you—you must see that."

He was silent.

"Tell me you see that," she persisted. "You must know that Chummy loves you—she loves you with all her soul. It's something tremendous!"

Steyne bowed his head.

"You know it's true," Judy said below her breath.

"Yes—I know!"

It was perhaps the most difficult admission that a decent man can make—the admission that a woman whom he does not care for cares for him. With it went Alan's bitter resentment that this so-called romance had been built up out of material which, to him, did not exist.

Frankly, truthfully, he had never made love to Clarissa Morley. They had just been great friends, as artists know how to be. He had never even dimly guessed at the tempest of emotion that had temporarily wrecked her mind.

And then, quite suddenly, Judy's nerves failed her. She tossed off a glass of wine and laughed, as she said to Alan in her huskiest voice:

"Honestly, if you don't marry Chummy, I shall think you're a pig!"

Steyne looked into her angry violet eyes and laughed, too.

"Thanks!" he said. "I'll remember that." A moment later he added: "It's absolutely unfair, and the worst of it is I can't explain."

This was quite true. How could he explain, for instance, that he had not had the slightest idea that Clarissa Morley cared for him?

"You said," Judy reminded him, "that if Chummy got better, and you found she really cared for you, you would be in honor bound to marry her."

"I said I should be in honor bound to ask her to be my wife!"

"Do you think she'd refuse?" asked Judy with a choky little laugh.

He did not answer.

"You know she thinks it's just the one natural thing in the world," Judy said.

Discussion seemed fruitless, and they left the restaurant. Judy had an appointment at Vincent Stornaway's. She had to wait a few minutes for a bus. Steyne stood by her side in moody silence.

"Good-by," the girl said. "Here comes a forty-six!"

He looked at her, his face tense and a little reddened by the fever in his blood.

"Judy, if Clarissa won't marry me, will you?"

"No," she answered. "Nothing would induce me to—nothing in the world!"

(To be continued in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

The Flame of the Emerald

THE STORY OF A SEA-CAPTAIN, HIS SON, AND HIS SHIP

By Kenneth Howell

GRIM, silent, of forbidding aspect, old John Fleming navigated the tramp Emerald on its charted courses of trade over the oceans of the world. He had spent twenty years on the same ship, and she was not new when he first stepped on board. Eastern seas, the great ports of western continents, the placid shallows of island waters, combined in a shifting background that blended into the life of the old sea-captain and the existence of his wandering command. Faithfully, honorably, he served his American owner, nursing, coaxing, and driving his ship in the hard pursuit of dollars for the little one-ship company.

It seemed that much of his faith and honor had, in some mysterious way of the sea, been imparted to the behavior of the battered tramp; had come to be like a breath of life governing the metallic fabric of the ship. Time and time again, in storm, in racing for a cargo, in steady endurance, Captain Fleming demanded the limit of her powers from the Emerald. She never failed him. They worked together, these two, and the smoothness of the union made their competition successful over many younger shipmasters and their swifter, stronger, more modern steamers.

Steadily the welding of the ship and the seaman progressed until John Fleming never conceived of life apart from the Emerald. She was his home, his charge, his cause for living, his destiny; and yet, in return for the service she gave, behind every care, every thought for the ship, he held in his heart, harshly suppressed, a blind, senseless hatred. He hated the gaunt, high bridge, and he kept it immaculate. He had come to loathe the decks, as clean at sea as those of a passenger boat, the wheezing, panting engines, the whole ship from truck to keel, fore and aft.

His bitterness, powerless against the tramp, took heavy toll from himself. Little

by little he withdrew from the men that figured in his life. The first to fade from his circle were the men of its outer fringes—shore agents, ship-chandlers, certain pilots of old acquaintance. Next to grow dim was his recognition of members of crews that had remained with him from contentment, and even from loyalty to a kind commander.

Finally on this day, steaming at half-speed up the Ambrose Channel, came the mark of complete isolation.

It was late afternoon. The winter sky was blue-black behind a film of wind-torn clouds, which alternately massed into great gray banks and then dissolved into thin filaments of smoky vapor, drifting off on the stiff breeze toward the hazy sky-line of the city.

Captain Fleming walked to the door of the chart-room, and called sharply down the companionway:

"Steward! In the chart-room!"

When the man came, John Fleming for a moment seemed hesitant what to say. Little MacGill had been with him six years. Of course, that made no difference, and yet in some way—

"Starting with to-morrow's breakfast, steward, you can serve it in my room, after the others have eaten. That will hold at sea, too, for all my meals."

"Yes, sir," the steward answered quietly, but he looked his dismay in an indirect glance at the cold, gray face of his old commander.

In the brief meeting of their eyes the captain read the other man's feeling. He turned on his heel and stepped out on the bridge. The sounds of the harbor—whistles, noisy winches on near-by ships, the faint tolling of distant buoys—were drowned in the roar and scream of the heavy chain pounding over the drum of the windlass as the Emerald's starboard anchor

dropped into the waters of the bay. A thin cloud of dust hung over the fore-castle head—dust that had been mud in the bed of a shallow Chinese river.

The hours passed, the short twilight gave way to night, and the Emerald rode at anchor, motionless, silent, floating on the quiet surface of the roadstead like some wild sea-bird come to rest in the safety of a sheltered cove.

Below, in his stateroom, John Fleming sat late into the night at a little sea-desk built into the wall. The deep-set gray eyes under his bushy brows stamped his haggard face with an aspect of power, of dignity, that had been denied his spare body. For all their weariness, their veiled record of suffering, those gray eyes belonged in their smoldering depths to a fighter, a seaman.

In the shadows of his stateroom—the only light came from the passage outside the door, which was on the hook—the captain's eyes looked hard, and even merciless. His sixtieth birthday had passed, all unnoticed, during the voyage from the East.

A softly chimed eight bells sounded from the ship's clock above the desk. Midnight! The captain stirred in the easy chair, then sank back again, waiting.

The muttered grumbling in the white-painted radiator died away to an occasional thump. The dark cabin grew chill. At long intervals there was the faint creak of the ship as she swayed gently to the turning tide. Like a figure chiseled in stone, Captain Fleming sat low in his chair.

Gradually, as the hours wore on, the expression in his eyes softened and became tempered by compassion. The Emerald and his hate for her gave place in his thoughts to a deep flow of love for what the morning was to bring. Just before dawn his mind turned again to the ship—a mind instantly cold and bitter under the bite of memory. Again, as five years before, he heard Harry Fleming speak.

"It was the ship, father, that you—oh, it was the life that I hated so! It stifled me. The chance came for me to steal—I stole. You seem to care more for your ship than for me. You have been harsh, father—you and the Emerald!"

The memory of his own reply was not so clear. He had been dazed. The policeman in plain clothes outside of the door, the trembling youth slumped deep in the chair—the horror of it all had seemed a dream. His son a thief!

Then trial, conviction, and for himself again the open sea—a sea that had become dreary, a long gray path that stretched, bleak, without end, toward the shifting horizons. It was on that voyage that his love for his ship changed to hate. The change was swift, irrational, complete.

The patch of sky visible through the port-hole lost some of its intense blackness in the pallid rays of the sun not yet above the horizon. Captain Fleming started at the noise of a motor-boat bumping against the heavy gangway below.

"Free!" he muttered.

There came an uncertain step in the passageway, a timid knock, and John Fleming raised his eyes to the door. It opened slowly, and he saw, framed in the aperture, cruelly revealed in the light of the freshening day, his son.

Harry Fleming stood there plainly ill at ease, apprehensive, staring at his father with wistful eyes that seemed to ask for something he did not expect to find. He was thin; his face looked like that of a man of fifty, and he was just twenty-eight years old.

The tension broke at once as John Fleming got slowly to his feet.

"Welcome home, son! Sit here in the big chair. Do you want to rummage in the galley? The cooks are ashore."

Harry shook his head.

"I'm glad to be back on the Emerald," he said.

A shadow darkened the captain's face. His brown hand released its grip on his son's. He spoke slowly, and his hesitation made his words sound a little stilted.

"If you feel the same as your letter told me—about—about staying on the Emerald, I want to tell you now that it means everything to me—having you back—and all. It's been lonesome, Harry. This ship has somehow come in my mind to stand for a curse!"

He raised his hand at the protest he saw gathering in the eyes of the younger man.

"Just let me finish, son, and we'll never mention it again. This ship has come to mean a prison—my prison—and at the same time it has stood as the shadow of yours. When you were my third mate, years ago, you hated it. Now I can understand that hate. The ship ruined you. It is my sorrow now that I have no other start for you than to come back to this ship."

Harry Fleming smiled nervously.

"It is home to me now, father. How long are you to be in port?"

"A week, at the most. We are to load for the Argentine. Your old berth is waiting for you. Once back in harness, you can go up for a second mate's license."

There was a long silence, broken at last by Harry Fleming. He spoke jerkily, pouring out his words, as if fearful even of his father. The corners of his mouth twitched uncontrollably. There was fear—naked, raw fear—in his gray eyes.

"I can't expect you to understand," he murmured; "but things happen to a man shut in behind those walls. I could not be an officer now. Even a trick at the wheel as a seaman—no, I am going below in the stoke-hole. I fired once—you remember?—in the Java Straits, when the fever hit the ship. Things are bad with me. I am afraid of the world. Somehow the fire-room means a fresh start—my chance—my freedom."

The eyes of the old sea-captain softened in pity and love. The habitual compression of his lips relaxed. He rose from his chair and stood over his son.

"Your chance," he whispered hoarsely, "in the stoke-hole of the Emerald—take it, Harry!"

II

HER towering sides, painted a dingy black, but whitish-gray where the seas had left their frozen line, her decks coated with patches of ice, with great drifts of snow in the lee of the deck-houses, winches, and lifeboats, the tramp Emerald steamed steadily southward on the first leg of her run to the Argentine.

Two days out of New York, in the early morning, on the four-to-eight watch, a light breeze sprang up, and its mild warmth seemed to remove the record of the blizzard with the swift completeness of an eraser passed over the surface of a chalk-marked blackboard. As the ice softened under the refracted shafts of a clouded sun, its melting found no mirrored likeness in the grim thoughts of the little gray-faced commander of the steamer.

The Emerald had a captain's deck below the bridge, and here John Fleming spent long hours on this first warm day, lying quietly on a ship-made deck-chair. It seemed to him now that all the bitterness of years—years of pity and shame for his son, years of unmixed hatred for his ship—was

coming down upon his head in a stream that could not be withstood. Hate, loneliness, bleak despair, and always the somber reaches of the sea!

With a sudden catch in his breath he recalled his sight, two days before, of Harry Fleming coming off the first sea watch. The Emerald had been plunging through heavy head seas—great blackish-gray masses of water, white-crested under the furious drive of sleet-burdened wind-squalls. The captain was in the wheel-house on the bridge, carefully watching his ship, balancing jerkily to the steep slope of the pitching deck. The seaman at the wheel leaned forward across the spokes and struck eight bells. The old man stepped to the door, and after a sharp struggle opened it and passed out upon the bridge. He stood with his hands tightly grasping the after rail, and stared aft, blinking into the thick curtain of snow that shrouded the ship.

Then a momentary lull in the wind left a gap in the falling flakes, and the ship became visible, a gray fabric, a ghostly shape floating on a phantom sea. With fierce intensity the shipmaster kept his eyes on the little iron door that opened from the stoke-hole ladder to the deck. It swung open suddenly, and a gigantic West Indian negro, his great black chest and shoulders covered with a thin cotton undershirt, stepped out into the cold. He laughed and pretended to shrink back, then strode swiftly aft. At his heels two others followed.

The captain stared and unconsciously shook his head. Then his hands tightened on the rail. The iron door opened slowly, as if under a feeble touch, and John Fleming saw his son stumble out over the high step. Drenched in sweat, blackened and streaked with coal-dust, panting wildly, Harry stood gulping in the cold air, a shrunken, exhausted figure.

The captain's steady gaze followed his son's swerving course down the short passageway. He saw Harry stagger once, then disappear into the firemen's quarters. For a long time John Fleming stood by the rail, seeing nothing, thinking. A single word, faintly muttered, came from his parted lips:

"A derelict!"

The storm closed down again over the ship. At the deep, harsh blare of the tramp's whistle, snatched away on the screaming wind, Captain Fleming left the rail and fought his way back to the wheel-

house. He saw his mate look up in frank inquiry and then turn again to the open log-book.

III

AFTER that episode, for two days Captain Fleming caught no glimpse of Harry. To-day, looking out over the calm sea, he felt a sharp desire to have his son on deck by his side. He wanted to talk with him, to come again to know the boy he had lost for five years—the boy who had gone wrong through some inherent weakness in character intensified by the narrowing existence on the Emerald and played upon by sudden temptation.

The captain heard MacGill busy in the pantry, and on impulse called him out on deck.

"MacGill, go aft to the firemen's quarters and tell Harry to come for'ard."

He noticed the flicker of a smile cross the lips of the little man.

"Why, he's pleased!" Captain Fleming thought. "I wonder why!"

His welcome to his son was warm, though a little uncertain. The situation was not an easy one. The tired, thin man leaning against the rail seemed the ghost of the youth whom John Fleming had brought up from boyhood on this wretched ship.

"Well, son, are you getting used to the work?" he asked after a long pause.

The other avoided his father's glance, his eyes shifting off to play restlessly over the blue expanse of water. When he spoke, there was a low note of doubt in his voice.

"I don't know, father. My body may stand up to it, for that will probably harden in time; but somehow it's the mind that hurts. In the racking grind below queer thoughts come, in a sort of rhythm to the swing of the shovel and the falling away of the floor-plates. The drive of the engines is like a song—a song of suggestion, not of definite meaning."

Harry stopped abruptly.

"This must sound wild talk to you, father," he added.

John Fleming made an impatient gesture of dissent.

"Go on!"

"Well, in the whole work below I miss what I expected to find. There is no loyalty to the ship down there, in officers or men. This is to be a long voyage. Oh, you know how it used to be, how it is on almost all deep-water craft—a lot of good-

humored growling and abuse of the engines, and then a general settling down to the business ahead. Why, this is a splendid ship, father! The old Emerald, how often I thought of her while I—"

He stopped at the look of pain on the captain's face.

"To-day, in the mess-room, one of the older men said that it was an ugly piece of business when even the skipper was known to hate his ship. The others laughed, but I didn't. Dad, it's bad for you, it's bad for the old Emerald. Let's not always flinch from this prison shadow. Long ago I came to see that the life on this hard-working tramp was clean and honest. I hold nothing against the ship."

John Fleming shook his head, and the subject was dropped for the time.

There were many talks like this on the captain's deck while the old steamer lumbered southward. The Indies were left behind—flashing gems, iridescent mirrors of brilliant tropic suns, set in the deep blue of the island seas.

As the voyage wore on, despite the barriers he had raised about him, Captain Fleming became aware that the spirit of the ship was changing—changing for the better. It was apparent everywhere—in the wheelhouse, in the work of the seamen on deck, in the snatches of broken talk that drifted into his stateroom from the saloon. Bitterly he blamed himself for the sense of annoyance that the change brought him, for his grim condemnation of his old command; but in his heart the hatred still rankled. He told himself that it was a dangerous obsession, but he could not change it.

It was all well enough for these others, sailors and officers too—children, most of them, after all. They were simply reacting to the comfort of a well-found ship under the command of a capable, considerate shipmaster. As for himself—well, it was impossible to forget his fixed belief that Harry had been made a convict by the environment of this same wandering tramp.

And yet to his blinded eyes every day brought fresh proof, which he saw only vaguely, that in this very environment Harry Fleming was fighting back to victory. The young fellow was deeply tanned from spending many hours on deck. His face was thin but stamped with health, and the gray pallor of the prison was completely gone. His father, ridden by the specter of shame, sensed little of this improvement

in the appearance of the son he loved, though it went on before his eyes from day to day.

One burning day the Emerald crossed the equator on a sea that was flat and glaring like molten steel. Not a breath of air stirred the placid waters, which seemed to parry the fierce thrust of the sun, hurling it back to the hard blue vault of the sky. The black-painted tramp steamed on toward the distant horizon, its seething wake swallowed at a ship's length in the dazzling glitter of the sea, its smoke rising straight from the stack until, in the higher levels of the air, it drifted off on a vagrant current.

To the captain, lying at full length on his deck-chair under the white canvas awning, came Ralston, the third mate. There was a smile on his lips, but Captain Fleming detected a queer expression in the youngster's eyes. It was as if he hesitated to ask anything out of the line of duty from this grim, aloof shipmaster.

"Captain," said Ralston, "the men want a Father Neptune party. A lot of the crew have never been south of the line. Can we break out canvas for a tank?"

John Fleming's face was expressionless as he gave his consent. Later, when the shouts and rough laughter of strong men at play drifted up from the foredeck, the old man walked to the rail and stood looking down upon the traditional ceremony of crossing the equator.

His eyes immediately found Harry, who was helping a sailor to toss a messman into the canvas pool. Was it possible that this laughing, care-free lad was the man who had stolen out to the ship in the hour before sunrise, just four weeks ago? Then he was fresh from prison, stamped with the pallor of its gray walls. Now his face was flushed beneath the tan, and he moved with lithe strength and buoyant confidence.

His father, on the deck above, felt a sudden rush of happiness as he discerned the change. The strangest part of it all, he thought, was that the boy had openly expressed his liking for the Emerald. Well, if Harry could come to like the old steamer now, it promised well for the time when he could face promotion and responsibility.

"And that's not far off," muttered Captain Fleming.

As he ate his solitary supper, late in the evening, it was with a lighter heart than he had known for years. At seven o'clock Harry came forward, and they sat together

on the little section of deck, smoking and watching the sun go down.

IV

A WEEK passed—a long, hot week, with the steamer a heated mass of metal forcing its way through a glazed sea that heaved monotonously under the burning rays of a fiery sun. The officers went about in cotton undershirts. The men off duty lounged aft in the stifling shade of their awning. The sky was cloudless, a blue circle of undulating, shifting planes of scorched air.

Captain Fleming viewed with surprise, but without alarm, the sudden dropping of the barometer. Assured of the staunchness of his ship, the efficiency of the engines, he went to his berth early in the evening. At three in the morning he woke to an insistent knocking at the door. MacGill was in the passageway.

"It's Harry, sir—we think he is dying or dead. He's in the hospital."

The man paused at the terror that he saw in Captain Fleming's face, then blurted out disjointedly:

"A Greek was knocked out in the bilge. The boy went after him, and was smothered by gas. I gave first aid, but it failed. He was down there too long. Mathews fished him out, and—"

"Hurry!" said the captain hoarsely. "You never should have left him!"

Harry Fleming lay inert on a narrow bed. His knees were drawn up under his chin in a grotesque contortion. His eyes were open, but expressionless. Their dullness was accentuated by a thin film, like breath on the surface of a mirror. There was no apparent heart-beat, no pulse.

Desperately the captain and the steward worked over the injured man. After a quarter of an hour came the first hint of success, the jerky throb of a feeble pulse. The black, congested face lightened to a yellowish purple.

"We've fetched him!" said MacGill.

The captain turned impatiently to the door.

"Well, Ralston, what is it?" he cried. "Can't you see what—"

"We know, sir. We're all pulling for your son, but the storm is breaking, and the mate wants to know if there is any change in course."

John Fleming glared wildly at the third mate. His voice was raised to a shout.

"Change the course! Are you mad?"

Then suddenly he understood. He turned again to the huddled shape on the bed. He spoke to the mate from the corner of his mouth.

"Tell Mr. Black to stand in for Rio. We'll run for a hospital. If Sparks can raise a passenger ship in these waters, tell him to send a doctor's radio."

As the morning dragged on, the ocean seemed to grow completely motionless. There was a heavy depression in the air, which was as still as the water. Then, with the suddenness of tropical storms, great masses of clouds banked in the southwestern sky, and, accompanied by a shrill, screaming whine, wind and sea swept down on the ship. A faint gleam from a vanquished sun replaced the brilliance of the early morning.

Except for the creaking of the bulkheads and the muffled drone of the wind, there was silence in the hospital. The captain and the steward had done their work.

"There's a chance," muttered MacGill.

"It's a race," snarled the shipmaster. "This rotten ship had to stick her nose into a blasted gale, to slow her down! I've got to go up there now, MacGill. Send word if Harry—"

The other nodded as the captain made his way to the door against the steep pitch of the ship.

Captain Fleming took the bridge at noon, tight-lipped, his face emotionless. The old Emerald was plunging into heavy seas that swept down upon her in gray ranks stretching endlessly to the distant horizon. From time to time, as beasts crouch under the lash of a trainer, the waters would flatten for a moment before the unleashed might of the wind. Then their white-crested summits again leaped high, hurling themselves redoubled on the laboring tramp.

She shuddered under the beating. Great cataracts of green water fell on her foredeck in wild smothers of foam, which swirled hissing into the scuppers. The tops of combers, torn off by the wind, drove in vicious thrusts against her bridge and superstructure. Two windows in the wheel-house were blown in, and in a moment the place was flooded.

The deafening scream of the hurricane was overwhelming now, with the deeper timbre of crashing seas sounding the illimitable power and menace of the ocean. Carefully, steadily, the little gray commander drove his ship. He stood close by

the wheel without a hat, his oilskins streaming with rain-water and with sea-water.

At times, when the Emerald fell away before the terrific impact of several grouped waves, he gave a steady hand at the wheel, his gnarled fists gripping the wet, glistening spokes until the ship had swung back on her course. For the most part, he studied the sea ahead, staring into the welter of flying spume that clung like a low cloud over the surface of the tortured water.

Far ahead, rearing up above its fellows, towering to an immense height, he would see a vast, dimly visible wave, appearing solid as it neared the ship. It would thunder down upon the Emerald, its summit on a level with the bridge. Then, as the plunging bows of the steamer bored into the hill of water, its crest would fall with a hollow, drumming crash on the iron plates of the deck. At such times the side muscles in the little man's face relaxed visibly at the passing of the danger.

Hardly an unnecessary word was shouted there in the wheel-house. As the hours passed, the officer on watch, and, in a more furtive manner, the seaman at the wheel, stole quick glances at the captain of the ship—the cold, morose skipper who ate alone, who hated his command. Now they saw him nursing it, coolly, splendidly.

Watch after watch was relieved, the night came and vanished before the faint gleam of a hidden sun, but the oncoming mate always found the shrunken little figure near the wheel or leaning against a window-frame, staring out ahead, and looking for a wave that might spell disaster. Every man in the wheel-house knew that if the ship ever sheered into the trough it would be the end. Swept clean, she would roll on her beam-ends and founder. Every man on the ship understood this—the cooks struggling to make coffee on a tossing range, the seamen off watch standing by for a call, the engineers below nursing the worn engines, the sweating, blackened men in the stoke-hole; and, over them all, isolated in the loneliness of command, the captain.

He was drinking rum in his coffee now—not much, and not often. As the second night came down on the sea, he realized that his eyes must never close in the hours ahead. Once, about midnight, he started suddenly and peered in momentary bewilderment, which changed to self-contempt

and swift anger when he realized that he had slept. His glance shot back at the clock, but it told him nothing of the time he had lost consciousness.

"Damn you!" he shouted to the mate on watch. "Keep me awake!"

His words were lost in the howl of the storm. Ralston grinned nervously. After the manner of ships, swiftly, from man to man, from group to group, the word got about:

"The old man's goin' to take her through! Relief be damned!"

At long intervals MacGill sent word to tell John Fleming of his son's condition, and the news they brought made the old man look desperate. After each report his jaw set, and slowly he turned again to his vigil.

His judgment was still mechanically clear, but his thoughts wandered. His handling of the ship was perfect. He studied every move of the craft he knew so well. Once he muttered to himself:

"Come on, old Emerald! We're going through!"

He felt no surprise when suddenly, like the return of a lost sweetheart, he seemed to find again in his heart the love for the battered tramp, the old Emerald, the Emerald that was doing her best, that had always given her best, the ship that would serve and serve to the end of her course. Ship and shipmaster, wanderers of the world, nomads of commerce, from port to port, from sea to sea, fighters, partners!

In the midst of the storm, like a brilliant beam of light, cleansing his thought of bitter memories, came the steady contemplation of the old tramp. Ruined Harry? No, by Heaven—she had made him! To give his life for another—but it wasn't given—not yet. With every drive of her straining engines, she was striving to save it.

"Come on, old Emerald!" Captain Fleming muttered again.

The mate looked at him narrowly.

"Better turn in for a spell, sir," he shouted through cupped hands.

John Fleming shook his head.

The storm died on the morning of the third day, and through seas that still ran heavy the lumbering, straining steamer stood in toward the Brazilian coast. At noon Sugar Loaf Mountain loomed dark against the clearing sky, and a few hours later the harbor of Rio de Janeiro opened before the blunt bow of the tramp.

She came into the roadstead at half speed, the doctor's flag whipping from its halyard. Even as the anchor crashed into the bay, the port physician came up a dangling sea ladder. He climbed over the rail, and for a moment looked curiously round the deck. He saw a smashed lifeboat, a thick cargo-boom twisted loose from the mast, a canvas tarpaulin replacing a hatch, and, standing before him, a thin, worn shadow of a man, haggard, indescribably weary, with an officer's cap on his head.

The doctor stared.

"A bit of a blow you've had, eh, captain? Where is the sick man?"

V.

CHRISTMAS night of the next year found the Emerald anchored off the landing-stage at Liverpool. The Mersey flowed on toward the mouth of the harbor, a dark, shadowy river, crowded with ships of all nations, its shores lined with the massive structures of offices and warehouses, dry docks and basins. Far down the stream, in the Gladstone Dock, the vast hulk of the Mauretania loomed over the buildings adjacent, and the big ship's slanting funnels stood out black against the misty darkness of the sky.

At the summons of the smiling MacGill, Captain Fleming turned from the rail and went directly to the saloon. He stood for a moment in the open door, pleased and surprised at the holiday appearance of the ordinarily drab little room. There were bits of tinsel, streamers of bright-colored paper, and a small artificial Christmas-tree in the center of the table. All the ship's officers—engineer and deck—were present.

"Good work, MacGill!" said the captain, taking his place at the head of the table.

He was happy this night with his officers—faithful, steady fellows, all of them. They were all elderly men, except the irrepressible Ralston and Harry, who were a little too noisy down at their end of the table. Still, this was Christmas, and they were fine lads.

As the tobacco-smoke thickened, mock toasts were given and drunk by these two inseparable youngsters. They pledged each other, the shore, the girls of Liverpool, the life of a landsman. Suddenly Harry Fleming leaned forward, his face solemn, but with laughter dancing in his eyes.

"I give you the Emerald!" he cried.

"The old Emerald—the finest ship in the world!"

There was a stir at the head of the table. The room grew still. Mirth yielded to a sense of embarrassment, which in turn gave way to respect.

Quietly they watched the old sea-captain rise to his feet. The refracted gleam of

the wine in his goblet, held high for a moment, was mellow in the light of the lamp.

"The old Emerald—the finest ship in the world!"

He drank slowly, with solemn deliberation, then flung the fragile vessel behind him. There was the tinkle of broken glass from the corner of the cabin.

Tip-Tops and Second-Bloods

THE ROMANCE OF A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MOTHER AND A
TWENTIETH-CENTURY DAUGHTER

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

SOCIETY in Burnham might have been classified more distinctly than is usual in Southern towns. The apex of the pyramid was Mrs. Carrington Selden. The innermost circle was composed of those who could shake hands with Mrs. Selden. The second circle was made of those who could shake hands with those who had shaken hands with Mrs. Selden; and so on into outer darkness.

The social arbiter of the town was Mrs. Selden's schoolmate and lifelong friend, Mrs. Hamilton Ruffin Payne. Mrs. Selden, dainty as a bit of porcelain, was also as fragile, and it was generally accepted that only those whom Mrs. Payne admitted into her home gained the entrée to Selden Manor.

Though few estates in the South now remain in the hands of the descendants of the original owners, the tract of land belonging to the manor had been a crown grant, and was still in possession of the family because of the lucky circumstance that ten years before the Civil War a Selden had married a New England girl. Her father died during the reconstruction period, and she had come into a fortune of substantial Yankee dollars at a time when her husband had lost everything in Confederate bonds. The new fortune, wisely invested, had meant help to many a friend in those dark days, and the subsequent increase in property values had made the Carrington Selden of today a millionaire several times over.

Incidentally, he was the only millionaire in Burnham. It was one of the rambling, charming Southern towns where the population remains comfortably around thirty thousand, and fifty thousand is spoken of by the occasional booster as "Our Goal."

Selden Manor was the first place exhibited to a stranger when he came to Burnham.

"Twelve miles of asphalt roads within their own grounds," the loyal Burnhamite would explain, as he drove through the stone gates; "and all of it open to the public, except the turn that leads to the house. I met a man who said there was nothing in Europe finer than this river drive. There's a swimming-pool, too, all glassed over, with a marble balustrade around it, and birds in cages and hanging baskets of ferns—mighty pretty, I'm told; and a ballroom as classy as a big hotel's. Selden has only a nine-hole golf-course, though. Now if it was me, I'd cut out the pool and the tennis-courts, and put that money into eighteen holes, taking in that meadow over there. But he's a good egg, all right, and a good spender."

There was nothing which Selden disliked more than the frequent allusions to him in the local papers as "Burnham's most public-spirited citizen," and nothing which would have infringed so deeply on his self-respect as for this not to be the fact. He liked the old creed, "Where leisure and opportunity meet, it makes obligation," and he lived up to it quietly—"as a gentleman

should," he perhaps added unconsciously in his mind.

He gained the approval even of Mammy, Mrs. Payne's servant, who had been with her ever since her daughter Penelope was a baby, and whose admiration was passing hard to win.

"He's a tip-top all right, Marse Selden is. Nobody ain't gwine ter mistook him fer one of dese second-bloods. He's got a mighty air wid him, and a noble nose. 'Tain't a spraddly nose all ober his face, and 'tain't a hook nose, and 'tain't one of dese perky, smarty, tu'n-up noses, nudder. Hit's a noble nose, and he's a tip-top. Lemme press dat, honey. De kitchin's pow'ful hot fer you."

Penelope held to the iron.

"I can press it better than you can, Mammy, and you know how mother is about noticing a crumpled frock." She laughed, but not as mirthfully as belonged to her nineteen years. "Even if I have to press my own clothes, it's to wear them at one of mother's exclusive parties. The guests will eat up all the beaten biscuit and the Lady Baltimore cake, and at supper to-night mother will say that she doesn't want anything after her tea. I shall be twice as hungry from rushing around and serving people, so I suppose I'll have to hunt up a soda-cracker or two!"

Mammy was always scandalized at these outbursts on Penelope's part. It really wouldn't have been worth while to indulge in an occasional flare of girlish petulance if Mammy couldn't be counted on to take it seriously.

"Miss Penelope, chile, what you mean talkin' like dat? You orter be down on your marrow-bones thankin' de good Lawd you's yer ma's chile and she de fines', purties', mos' high-class, top-notch lady of dem all, and all dese second-bloods a strivin' ter git ter her parties and didapperin' deyselves ter make her notice 'em!"

"What's didappering, Mammy?" Penelope queried.

"Ain't you nebber seen dat leetle bird, a didapper, flauntin' hisself aroun' tryin' ter git notice took of him? Dat dress sholy looks fine!"

Penelope looked attractive in it that afternoon, though she would never attain the distinction of her mother's type. Mrs. Payne had been a beautiful girl, and at forty-five she was a beautiful woman, with dark, expressive eyes, gray hair which she

wore royally, a slender figure, and exquisitely aristocratic hands.

It was an afternoon in April, still a little chilly, so there was the blaze of a log fire in the drawing-room. There were many flowers, for the Seldens had sent the choicest blossoms from their greenhouses.

Mrs. Payne's days at home were always agreeable and informal. In the library, four had withdrawn for a game of bridge, while the group in the drawing-room sat talking of many things—the frank, free talk of friends. Somehow, at Mrs. Payne's, there was always an absence of small personalities; the talk seemed to move serenely and without effort into wider channels.

"It's Mary Payne's gift," said Mrs. Selden to her husband, as they were motoring back to the manor. "She makes everybody feel welcome, because everybody is welcome. Her *métier* is hospitality."

"I don't see how she manages," he returned in a perplexed voice. "Even to us she will never broach the subject of ways and means, but the failure of the cotton-mill in which she had stock must mean a considerable reduction in her income, and it was straitened enough before."

"It's for Penelope that Mary must manage to make no change for the present," Mrs. Selden reasoned. "She says that the girl is eager to go to work. Indeed, I heard Penelope tell her mother, the other day, that she'd rather be a caddy and earn fifty cents at golf than be playing the game and struggling to find the fifty cents! She is bitten with half-baked theories of self-support—not that I disagree with the principle, of course; but she owes it to her mother, who has endeavored so steadily to educate her properly and to keep open her rightful place in the world, to fill that place with grace."

"Penelope hasn't that quality. She has amazing vigor and a certain degree of prettiness, but not grace. I've a tremendous affection for the child, however, even though I know she's a stubborn young piece."

"It would all be settled so fittingly if Penelope cared for Charles!" continued Mrs. Selden. "It's as plain to me that she avoids him as it is that Isabella Gwynne is trying to secure him for her daughter. Ada Gwynne would be clay in her mother's hands, but there's nothing plastic about Penelope."

"Why, I think Mrs. Gwynne a very

sweet little woman," replied Selden, in some surprise; "not in the least the scheming, wily-mother type."

Mrs. Selden did not answer, but her smile was half-ironic, half-maternal. The dear blindness of good men!

II

It was a warm, sunny afternoon in May. All of Penelope's set, including Ada Gwynne, had gone to the manor for a swim in the Selden pool, but Penelope stayed at home, pricked with a spirit of restlessness and dissatisfaction. Charles was insisting upon an answer, and Penelope believed that her mother thought it a gracious interposition of Providence that he should want to marry her.

He had brought letters of introduction to Mr. Selden when he had come to Burnham from an adjoining State. He bore one of its proudest names, and his manners were agreeable and elegant, but his appearance was distinctly inconspicuous.

"I won't marry anybody an inch shorter than I am!" Penelope was saying sulkily to herself. "I won't go to Mrs. Selden's, because he'll be there, and he looks so skinny in his bathing-suit—positively *skimpy*! And when Chinless Charlie tags around me I can tell that mother is thinking to herself how 'fitting' it is for his great-grandfather's great-grandson to marry her daughter. I sha'n't go! I don't care if Ada Gwynne looks at him as if he were six feet tall and broad in proportion!"

Penelope was wearing a pink gingham. Her full young lips were pouting from her sense of injury. Her eyes were blue and eager and inquiring. There was nobody alive to warn Mrs. Payne that at that moment Penelope bore no likeness to the ancestor who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, but strongly resembled the great-great-grandmother who was a pioneer.

The girl sat by the window of an upper balcony, which had been partially enclosed to make a sleeping porch. The smell of fresh paint that came to her was not objectionable to her as it was to her mother.

"I wish we could afford to have the house well painted for once!" she thought, her rebellious mood finding many pegs to hang on. "Always having to dicker for just one coat at a time—Why—why, how do you do?"

The exclamation came involuntarily, as

the top of a red head suddenly appeared at the open window. A moment later she was looking into a pair of bright hazel eyes.

The painter had just put his ladder against that part of the house. He was as much surprised as she was to find himself facing a pretty girl on the other side of the window-frame.

"Beg pardon—I can paint the other side first, if you'd prefer."

"I don't prefer. I'd like to watch you do it."

A few minutes later Penelope demanded impulsively:

"Let me try! I like to do things. I know I could paint all right. There! I splashed that on too much, didn't I? Your stroke was steadier. Like this? Is this right?"

In the pink frock, with her hair curling about her forehead and her skin slightly moist, like a baby's, from her exertion, she made a winsome picture as she worked diligently.

"You've flirted some paint on your pretty dress. I'll climb down the ladder and get some turpentine to take it out."

The spot was on her shoulder, and as the young man carefully removed the paint they had perforce to stand close together. Penelope had a queer, startled feeling that she liked the shape of his firm chin. And how strong his shoulders were, how sinewy his hands, with the faint reddish hairs which shone in the sun! She felt suddenly, electrically, alive to her finger-tips.

"I've taken this job at a flat rate, so it's not your mother's loss if I dawdle, as I'm not bein' paid by the hour," he said.

The independence of his explanation pleased her. Then she made a remarkable speech, absolute in candor and as bare as a board:

"Then rest awhile and talk to me. In all my life I've never before had a chance to talk to a common man!"

He showed no resentment at her amazing words. He curiously understood her. He wiped his brush carefully before replying. Then his eyes, masterful and masculine, met hers squarely.

"All right! Talk to one—the scum of the earth, at your feet!"

He sat down on the floor, as there was nowhere else to sit, with his arms around his knees. His muscular body had the easy grace of a panther.

Penelope spoke with breathless eagerness.

"Tell me, what do you get out of life? What does your work mean to you?"

The answer to that is always a large order. They talked like travelers from separate stars, knowing nothing of the other's orbit. Penelope listened more than she talked, though once she made him smile by the earnestness with which she said:

"To think I never knew before what 'open shop' meant! I thought it had something to do with Sunday closing."

At length prudence warned the girl that it was nearly time for her mother to return from the manor, and that Charles would probably come back with her for dinner.

Mrs. Payne merely thought that the new painter seemed to be a conscientious worker, though slow. She did not know that at last the house was receiving two full coats of paint; but Penelope knew, though she said nothing. Some days there was only chance for a passing word; again there would be a whole electric hour. Then the work was done, and for a fortnight she saw him no more.

She was stilly, curiously aware that he was gone—gone for always out of her life, with his vividness, his youth, his quick flares of temper, his warm, mocking hazel eyes, his strong body, his challenging voice.

Mrs. Payne was too gentle with her daughter to suggest that she should hurry her decision, but Mrs. Selden had said to her rather crisply that she owed it to Charles to give him a definite answer.

III

THERE came a night when Mrs. Payne had gone to a Colonial Dames reception, and Penelope had an engagement with Charles for a concert. With a sudden revulsion she felt that Charles, local talent, and the poorly ventilated opera-house made an unsupportable combination, and she telephoned that she could not go. No, she had a headache, she could not see him.

Now she would be alone all evening, and she hated to be alone. What was it she wanted? She said to herself that she did not know, and knew in her soul that she was lying. How could a man like that—an ordinary day laborer—dare to drop her? She had not seen him for two weeks.

She heard a sound which made her heart leap with such ecstasy that it terrified her, and yet it was the vulgar sound of a "flivver" stopping at their front gate. But it was his; he came and went in it to his work,

she knew the sound of it. He was daring to come to her home!

In the waning moonlight, as he strode up the walk, he did not look like a common workman; he looked like youth and strength incarnate. She gave a little inarticulate cry, with her hand to her throat.

He spoke without preamble, and his voice rang challengingly, almost angrily.

"Will you come for a ride in my roadster? It's a second-hand flivver, and it smells of spilled paint. Will you come?"

She rose without a word and followed him. They went fast—so fast that she was shaken against him, and felt the contact of his shoulder. It seemed to her there was a humming in her ears—no, it was her eyes that were making all the world seem unreal. They saw a whirling world of velvety darkness, of stars.

They had gone miles in silence before he spoke. His voice was still so tense that she realized, with a pang of understanding, that he had been fighting to regain his self-control all those swift, vanished miles.

"It's been hell and damnation not seein' you these two weeks, knowin' I'll never see you again—that it's nothin' to you, can never be! I get through my days like a dumb man, and then at night, later than this, I run my car by your house."

"I've heard you," she panted in a low, difficult breath. "Of all the cars that pass by, I have known yours!"

"I tell myself I'm man enough to stand it, and here I am whinin' like a sick pup!" The bitter, age-old need for reassurance that one does not suffer absolutely alone overwhelmed him. "Have you—*minded?*"

Penelope threw back her head. Her hands opened in a wide, unconscious gesture, as if she were renouncing all she had ever known of peace and security, her old life, Charles, the safe future, everything.

She quoted his words softly:

"It's been hell and damnation for me, too!"

He stopped the car and took her in his arms, his lips against the young throat.

"My girl, my girl! Are you brave enough to marry me? Could you stand livin' with a man like me?"

For answer, Penelope's hands strayed to his hair. Even in the darkness she knew its daring color and the unruly wave on his forehead.

"I want to belong to you. I'm going to try hard, *hard*, to make you happy!"

He spoke soberly, with the honesty which from the first had drawn her to him:

"It's not like I'd had what other men have had. I can't hardly remember my father and mother, I was such a little kid when they died. At the orphan asylum they were pretty good to me, but I don't know what a home is. It's like dumpin' it all on you—askin' you to be a wife and home and folks—my whole life except my work!"

"I'm glad it's like that," she answered, unafraid.

Perhaps the next few weeks of readjustment belonged more to the life-story of Mary Payne than to the bride-to-be. Her family and friends were aghast at the unequal mating. To Mrs. Selden, who believed the marriage should be forbidden at all hazards, Mary said simply, her face drawn with pain:

"I can't stamp out that flame in my child's heart."

"Though it burn her?" Elinor asked with foreboding.

"Though it consume us both," Mary answered.

She thought of her own marriage to a man whom she loved and honored, who was much older than herself. She had been happy, but she had never known the glory and abandon of young love as her daughter was knowing it. Even if the world called it madness, it was a transfiguring thing for a life to know such a period of glamour. The girl herself had no forebodings; she lived eagerly in the hour.

Penelope and Jim Brem were married in her own home, with only her relatives and the Seldens present, and they went off in the "flivver" for a wedding trip through the hill country.

In the kitchen, the tears were running down Mammy's wrinkled brown face.

"My chile marryin' a man out of de back yard!" she moaned to herself.

IV

MRS. PAYNE felt as if her house of life was in ruins, but her thoughts had to be occupied with the immediate detail of introducing her son-in-law to her own exclusive circle. At least he was a magnificent looking animal, and his talk had individuality, in spite of occasional grammatical lapses.

A dinner was out of the question. Jim

Brem had never been to a formal dinner in his life. A dance—a reception—her common sense negated either idea.

Then she decided that the simplest thing was the wisest thing. As soon as the young people returned from their trip, she would introduce him on her usual day at home; and in the mean time she would informally invite her friends to call that day.

All the morning they were sending flowers for the bride, so that the house was like a fragrant bower. Perhaps friendship was mingled with curiosity, but everybody came but one. The single exception was Isabella Gwynne, who feared that she might imperil her social position by meeting "that painter's wife."

Mrs. Gwynne gave the matter much thought, finally deciding that probably very few would be there, and then Mary Payne might expect her to entertain Penelope. It was wiser to see first what other people were going to do; so she pleaded an engagement with the dentist. Afterward, when she learned that she was the only one of the envied innermost circle who was absent, she was furious with herself for not going.

It seemed to Mrs. Payne that the afternoon went off better than she had dared hope, but that was balanced by the fact that her apprehensions had been great. She had suggested to her son-in-law that he should look after Mrs. Selden, to whom a few steps were now a burden because of the return of her old spinal trouble.

When Mrs. Selden took her leave, she looked so pale that Jim asked impulsively:

"Won't you let me take you to your car?"

She assented, and to her surprise he picked her up as easily as if she had been a kitten, and carried her down the box-bordered walk to her waiting limousine. She had a contrasting recollection of Charles's proffer of an arm, and an insight into what had won Penelope.

"Mrs. Payne tells me you have a good opening in Georgia, and are going there to live," she said gently. "I may not—see you again, perhaps; but I hope you and Penelope will remember how earnestly I wish you happiness."

If Mrs. Selden's kind eyes had seen some reason why Penelope had found haven in those strong young arms, she was alone in her understanding. Mrs. Payne's friends discussed the situation among themselves with the single verdict that it was appalling.

"He ate," said one of them to another, "as if he had just that moment taken his sandwich out of a tin bucket. He gulped his tea—two gulps, and the cup was empty. He stares at Penelope as if she were a luscious peach he was on the point of biting. He's absolutely raw!"

"He calls her 'Neppie.' It seems he is going to Georgia 'on a job.' I hope that it's to paint all the buildings in the State, and that he'll never come back. Dear brave Mrs. Payne, I wonder what she'll do!"

But Mrs. Payne's next few weeks were cut out for her relentlessly. She was constantly at the manor, lavishing care and tenderness on the friend whose lessening hold on life tore at her heart. Jim Brem understood Mrs. Selden's parting words better when his wife received some blotted lines from her mother, telling her of Elinor's death.

There followed months of quiet mourning. The manor was closed, for Selden had gone abroad. Mrs. Payne did not see her daughter again until she went to Georgia to be with Penelope when her baby was born. She wished to take Mammy with her, but Penelope warned that while her mother might tolerate her surroundings, Mammy never could!

She found Penelope in a new cottage with four small, square rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom with a tin tub. It smelled of linoleum and fresh planks. It was as new as a cut on the chin from shaving. Penelope explained proudly that it was a ready-built house, and that Jim had put it up himself, with the help of one man. He had painted it himself, inside and out. It had cost an amazingly small sum, and was already half paid for. The curtains were clean and fresh; Mrs. Payne's bedroom, with its crisp blue and white gingham covers, was really a livable, likable room.

Mrs. Payne gave due praise.

"Daughter, it's easy for me to give a place the aspect of home, with all the lovely old things I've inherited; but you have made an attractive, home-like place out of nothing at all."

Penelope brightened with pleasure. With her own motherhood near, she was nearer her mother in sympathy than she had ever been before.

"I've loved doing it, too, mother darling. Of course, if I had a lazy husband, we couldn't have managed all this in one year. There's not an idle bone in Jim's body. He

positively eats up work. And I'm so happy! It's like being a pioneer, shaping our lives to suit ourselves, building them from the ground up, with no help from anybody or anything, even inherited mahogany. Of course I'm glad to have the crib I used to sleep in, but I truly don't want anything else, mother. The old things wouldn't suit this tiny place. And I do know the most interesting people. There's a great friend of Jim's, Ben Green, who is an out-and-out radical. He's always dropping in for supper because he likes 'Mrs. Conservative's' waffles, and a good scrap afterward. Think of *me* as a conservative, who smashed my family idols and burned all my bridges! And there's a woman who is going about from home to home, teaching adults. She throws herself into her work with such passionate fervor! I like her better than any woman I've ever known. Oh, mother, suppose I had married Chinless Charlie, and had a life all mapped out and cut-and-dry talk instead of this wonderful *adventure*!"

Her mother smiled indulgently.

"You were too much occupied with your own thoughts, child, to pay much attention to the talk at our home. My friends and I disagreed about matters, and argued just as earnestly as your friends here—the difference being that we have learned to differ in opinions without raising our voices."

Penelope laughed.

"But that's half the fun of an argument! Except that it does amuse Jim and me to see how Ben Green eats out of your hand. Jim says you can change his roar to a bleat merely by looking at him with that pretty, deferential way you have of listening to other people's opinions. So Charlie married Ada Gwynne?"

"Yes, last month. There was a great deal of entertaining for them, and Mrs. Gwynne was so worn out she has gone abroad to rest awhile."

Penelope looked incredulous.

"Gone abroad? I bet she's gone to hunt Mr. Selden, mother."

She did not see her mother's uncontrollable shiver of repugnance, for she heard her husband's step on the porch and ran out to meet him. They kissed each other with frank ardor, disregarding any possible passer-by. It was as if Penelope was not the daughter of Mrs. Payne, with her reticences and inhibitions. Again she resembled the pioneer grandmother, long dead and forgotten.

When Mrs. Payne's small grandson attained the dignity of two months, she tore herself away from his fascinations. She saw that in the radiance of her young motherhood Penelope needed nothing to complete her happiness, while the bedroom Mrs. Payne occupied would do much toward adding to her comfort.

She was aware that neither her son-in-law nor Penelope's new set of friends was quite at ease with her. She had done her best, but she knew that the only real liking she had won was that of Ben Green.

"Look after my children," she said to him at parting. "Be their friend. I trust you!"

Months later she was to feel how well her confidence had been placed in Green, though his letter seemed to blast the last foundation of her life. It told her that Jim Brem had torn his right hand on a nail in an old house he was painting. The wound had become infected, and had developed into a bad case of blood-poisoning. Now he was slowly getting all right, but for weeks he had not been able to work, and he could not for some time to come. All they had saved up had gone into buying their home, and it was mortgaged for the rest of the purchase price. The notes would soon be coming due, and with times so bad it was hard for a working man to borrow money. They might have to sacrifice the house at any price to keep going until Jim could get back to work. Mayoe Mrs. Payne could help tide them over.

Green's letter ended simply:

You won't hurt their pride by letting them know I wrote you this. You'll save their feelings for them, for you are a great lady.

There was no alternative—her own home must go. The house in which she was born—the house which seemed an integral part of her life—it must go to save Penelope's little home. They could not both be saved.

Mrs. Payne's income was too slender to divide, but her house had a value—even an artificial value, given to it by association with her. If that value had not been able to keep her daughter from shaping her life as she had done, at least it could be the means of helping her now.

She wrote cheerfully to Penelope, saying that she had about decided to sell the home place, as it was too large for her to live there alone, and that half of the money from the sale would be her daughter's, as

she regarded it as their joint property. She would take a cozy apartment and save a few favorite pieces of furniture.

She added that she was shipping to Penelope a sewing-table which had belonged to their family in Colonial days, a desk for Brem, a brass fender which would be useful in the nursery when her small grandson began to toddle about, and a few other pieces for which she hoped her daughter could find a place. She chose things not too conspicuously out of keeping with the little cottage in the pines—things which might bear their silent testimony that it was a pleasant thing to live with the restful lines of good furniture.

The house sold at an excellent figure, and Penelope's letter of relief, of thankfulness—pouring out in a flood the consuming anxieties of the past months—made her mother feel that the sacrifice was worth while. Now they could pay off their debt, and the balance would give Jim a start in his work as a contractor. He would begin in a very small way, of course, but Jim was so energetic and ambitious that she knew he would succeed.

The baby, Penelope wrote, could stand alone, and it was too adorable to watch his pride! His head was positively fiery. Everybody said it was unusual to see such a very red head on a year-old baby. Now that this money had come, she was really and truly going to buy a pretty house frock and change in the evenings. She knew she had slumped dreadfully of late, but now everything was all right again.

Mrs. Payne herself felt curiously naked, as if she had been stripped bare. She moved into an apartment-house which seemed the best place available. It was the first time she had ever been housed with strangers, and she was bewildered by the closeness of contact—from the incessant noise of "jazz records" on the floor above to the neighborliness of the strange woman in the apartment below, who wanted Mrs. Payne to "drop in" every time she passed her door.

She had been born in the old house where the box-bushes shut out even the sight of the street. The garden, an intimately lovely place, had a brick wall around it, ivy-covered. When she heard that the new purchasers had torn down the wall, she had a pang of sympathy. As she went back and forth in the crowded elevator, jostled against strangers, she felt curiously like her

mother's walled-in garden, which had now lost the boon of privacy.

V

THEN came strange rumors. Isabella's daughter repeated bits from Mrs. Gwynne's letters. She had gone to Nice for rest, and by a fortunate coincidence she had chanced to meet Mr. Selden on the Promenade des Anglais. A later letter spoke of having him to tea, and how well he was looking.

"So Penelope was right, and that was why she went abroad at this time!" thought Mary Payne somberly.

She faced the fact that even the ugly apartment where she was making her home would no longer be tolerable if Isabella returned as mistress of Selden Manor. She had lost so much—was she to lose the durable friendship that Carrington Selden and she had known?

Mrs. Payne no longer kept her old day at home, but a number of her friends had a way of dropping in. As she made tea for them, and offered Mammy's spiced cookies, the talk slipped into a channel of pleasant understanding. Perhaps to all of them there was less consciousness of the new background than there was of Mary Payne's gracious and tender presence.

As the afternoon waned, something happened which galvanized everybody with new interest, for Selden came in, at home but an hour. There were the warmth of greeting and the joy of welcome, so that it was late when the last guest withdrew; but he outstayed them all.

"I did not know you were to come for two months yet, Carrington," Mary said.

"Nor I; but it happened that I heard you had sold your house—and I caught the first boat home."

"Who told you?" she asked, though suddenly she knew.

"That catty Gwynne woman," he answered. "I met her at Nice. Somehow I seemed always to be bumping into her. When I went over to Mentone, she happened to be there too. One evening she invited me to dine at her hotel, and her daughter had just written her of the sale of your home. Why didn't you write me, Mary? She said how regrettable it was that you were to move into a stuffy apartment-house, and I caught a curious purring note in her voice. I swear to you it was satisfaction, though you won't believe it! A cat like that can always take in another

woman. She moistened her lips with her little red tongue, she exuded satisfaction. Ugh! I didn't see her again, but I left the next day for Paris, to make arrangements to return home."

A flood of peace steeped Mary Payne's soul. Between them fell a silence, soft as the brush of a wing. He laid a hand on her slender hands.

"When I have longed that—that you might come to my home, Mary, the memory of your own place seemed to put a barrier between us. The manor never has had quite the charm of your home, princess of the walled garden!"

Her lips quivered wistfully over the name the Seldens had given her long ago.

"I'm no longer that. I'm a denizen of an apartment-house, and my fairy chariot is an elevator which gets 'stuck' daily!"

"That makes it easier for me to beseech you to come to me." At her startled look he went on quickly: "It was Elinor's dearest wish at the end that we, who loved her best on earth, should find happiness together. You know you can trust in my affection for Penelope, dear Mary."

He was very gentle, trying not to frighten her; yet the deepened color in her face, the bewilderment which added to the beauty of her dark eyes, made it harder to woo her quietly.

"Mary, because of our shared youth, our years of faith and friendship, could you walk with me the rest of the way?"

She thought of the mean restrictions of her life, of the spacious dignity and peace which might be hers, and because she was essentially high-minded, essentially virginal, she put the thought away from her.

"No," she answered gently.

He had always understood her—mercifully for them both. With reverence for her aristocracy of soul, he asked:

"Then will you marry me because I love you, dear? Because in this time of utter loneliness I have learned to love you with every pulse-beat of my heart, and my need for you is very great?"

Not even in her youth was she more beautiful than when she lifted clear, shining eyes to his:

"Yes, Carrington, gladly; for I love you!"

Burnham was a unit in its approval, for the only person with a dissenting opinion was still abroad.

Mammy was inclined to give herself airs to the old butler at Selden Manor.

"Hit sholy is fine ter see de tip-tops gittin' togedder wunst mo'!"

"What yer mean by 'tip-tops'?" he asked.

"Dey is de folks de second-bloods try ter do like," she defined.

Even Mammy's philosophy had been softened by her "chile's" happy letters, which her mistress read to her now and then, and she continued:

"Dey's allus been tip-tops and second-bloods and po' white trash and in-betweens,

and dey's room fer dem all, praise de Lawd! Ef dey warn't nobody but tip-tops, who'd be takin' chilluns ter de park in de street-car, and ridin' on de spinnin'-jenny, and scroog-in' in de circuses? Marse Ca'ington has a gran' time readin' books ter Miss Mary, wid cur'us talkin' like I nebber heared no folks talk in my bawn days; and one time I seen a man dat had *his* fun a drappin' spang out'n de skies wid a big ombreller. Hit's like dat garden yonduh. 'Tain't jes' roses—hit's all de miration of flowers in a mixtry tergedder, all a tryin' ter find de sun in dey own way!"

Marooned in Manna Land

THE SURPRISING ADVENTURE THAT BEFELL TWO THESPIANS
IN THE WILDS OF THE SOUTHWEST

By Emmet F. Harte

ABOVE, the cloudless vault of blue, with the sun, a blazing disk, at its zenith. Around, the vast, treeless level of deserted plain, with no movement save the dancing heat-waves above the straight, ruled lines of the railroad-track which stretched to far-off vanishing-points in east and west. Midway of that soundless, motionless expanse of earth and sky squatted a box-like structure in a blue-gray scar, where strewn cinders made a contrast against the parched brown of the plain. It was an ancient box car dismounted from its trucks to serve as a waiting-room for chance travelers.

In the scant shadow cast by the box-car station were the still figures of two persons—a man and a woman. They were travelers, by the fact that each sat on an up-ended suit-case, and strangers in that lonely land, to judge from their unhappy air and bizarre attire.

The man looked to be forty. He was short and stout, dressed in an astonishing suit of black and white clothes patterned like a checker-board in squares two inches across. His cherubic face, shining beneath the narrow brim of his small, round cloth hat, was oozing moisture and despair.

The woman beside him was strikingly different in at least two particulars—she was head and shoulders taller than her companion, and of majestic and splendid proportions; and the expression of placid calm on her countenance showed that she was unperturbed at their predicament—if it could be called that. She looked to be in her middle thirties. Her dress was an interesting combination of modesty in color and fabric and daring in ultrafashionable design.

The man struck a tragic pose and gazed darkly over the brown landscape.

"Marooned!" he said hollowly. "Cast away here, a thousand miles from the nearest outpost of civilization. Even to your stolidly sanguine imagination, ma'am, 'twill be a situation to stimulate thought, what?"

The lady uttered no word. She seemed pleasantly occupied with her thoughts, whether they were stolidly sanguine or not.

"And all of it," the man continued bitterly; "all of it, ma'am, thanks to you! 'You've made us what we are to-day, and I hope you're satisfied.'"

"What's that you're saying?" The woman stiffened her well-rounded figure into an attitude a little less relaxed. "You're

blaming me for it? Don't do it, Bud Macy! You can't get away with it."

"Ha, woman, so I found a chink in your armor of idiotic serenity, did I? Of course I blame you for the whole hopeless mess! You don't need to look demure and innocent like that out here in the desert. You think you're some actress, don't you, eh? You are—not! I accuse you, ma'am; and I'll cite you to a few facts. You want details, do you, my merry maid? You shall have a surfeit of 'em, egad! We had an offer for the summer to do a singing skit in that Brooklyn air-dome. Fifty a week, regular. Who turned it down? You, Mistress Macy! Who proposed taking a swing over the Western circuits with a bunch of grand-opera spasms, forsooth? You, ma'am! Who insisted on springing 'Il Trovatore' in that town of a thousand helions back there last night? Art in a pigsty! You, ma'am! Who was hit by the first carrot and narrowly missed by the over-ripe tomato which followed it? You, ma'am! Who—"

"Rubbish!" The woman shrugged a shapely shoulder. "The Western circuits would have been easy picking, Bud Macy, if you hadn't queered the skit trying to do monkey-shines. The trouble with you is you're rotten! It's true the first carrot grazed me, but it was thrown at you; and they got you with at least a couple of storage eggs all right, my fat little friend! But the biggest hit of all was when you stampeded down the street with those cowboys shooting off their pistols—oh!"

She burst into a throaty peal of laughter. "They weren't shooting at you, you poor simpleton! I saw it all. You didn't wait to see what was happening to me, either. While you're fixing responsibilities, don't forget that I, with my two lily-white hands, brought these two suit-cases from the hotel to the depot, where you lay in hiding after the riot."

"Gadzooks!" he murmured. "Riot is right! It was a reign of terror. I was sure glad to escape unscathed and let that nest of pirates keep what they owed us. This is a sorry country. If that conductor on the train had had the instincts of a human being, he would have carried us out of this devil's domain; but he was as bad as the rest. He ditched us without a qualm!"

"He ditched *you*," she said quietly, "all because you insisted on blowing a hurricane of hot air. I got off of my own free will—

to look after you. I could have gone on to the first town where there's a hotel. He said so."

"Bah!" the little man scoffed. "Trust a woman to justify herself! I suppose we're condemned to sit here the rest of the afternoon until another train happens to come along. If we can flag it, we'll ride to the next box car in the desert; and in the mean time we'll die of hunger and thirst."

The lady unpinned her hat, removed it, and proceeded to shake down and rearrange her hair.

"Take your handkerchief, if you have one," she said, "and wipe some of the soot off your sweaty face. There's somebody coming."

"Coming?" he ejaculated. "Who—what—where?"

She waved a hand toward the south.

"See that dark dot yonder? I've been watching it. It's moving, and I think it's coming this way."

"H-m! It will probably turn out to be a gang of wild cowboys, or a bunch of red Indians on the war-path. This would be a poor place in which to stand a siege—no water, no food, no arms or ammunition; but I'll meet them with a stout heart. You shall see, ma'am, how a brave man dies!"

"You mean you'll run 'em to death?" she observed unemotionally.

II

THE distant moving speck, with its unknown properties of menace or of saving grace, drew gradually nearer. It presently assumed a definite shape—that of two horses, galloping abreast, guided by some dominant agency whose only visible aspect consisted of a huge black hat above and behind.

It could be seen, in time, that the hat surmounted a man's head, which in turn was attached to a body with the usual complement of arms and legs, seated in a light, four-wheeled vehicle resembling a spring wagon. This equipage tacked slightly to windward and scurried up alongside the box car.

The man, lean, long-limbed, and exhibiting a wistful if not saddened mien, stared unblinkingly, first at the not unattractive figure of the woman, then at the checker-board raiment of the little man.

"Howdy?" he said at last, in a voice so dry it sounded crackly.

"Greetings!" responded the least but

rarely last to be heard member of the vaudeville team of Macy and Macy, classical songs and dialog. "A fair day, sir! A fit day, as a body might be excused for remarking, for the race."

The stranger eyed the speaker with languid interest.

"The race?" he said. "Which race?"

"The human race," smiled Bud Macy.

He of the saddened mien sniffed with brief appreciation of the sorry witticism.

"Comin' or goin'?" he asked mildly.

"Ah!" The smaller Macy assumed an elocutionary attitude. "Methinks, fair sir, you speak with a genial wit withal. You see before you two world-weary spirits. Grown weary of the mad mummeries of society, statecraft, finance, we—this marvelously beauteous woman whom I have the honor to call my first and, Heaven permitting, my last wife, and myself—decided to step aside for a space. You follow me, I trust? In a word, then, we chose from the entire charted area of the world this calm, unruffled, and, shall I say, unexciting spot as best suited to our desires for quiet. Later, perhaps, when we get around to it"—the speaker waved a hand in an airy gesture—"we'll repair to a hotel, preferably the quietest one we can find, and there we'll rest and relax, lolling at ease, steeping our souls in delicious languor. In short, my good friend, we are not only coming—we have come!"

The big-hatted man was obviously impressed by Bud's eloquence.

"Hotel?" he blurted. "Why, I run the only hotel inside of sixty miles. My place is about twenty miles south," he explained humbly. "Would you folks want—"

Macy and Macy exchanged wireless messages by way of childlike glances.

"Is this fellow some new kind of a nut?"

"Probably, but he looks harmless."

"He says he runs a hotel—that listens like food and wassail."

"Manna from the blue! Is his name Elijah?"

"Read up on your Scripture, kid! It's us that's Elijah. We better take a chance on this."

"Right! We've everything to gain and nothing to lose."

Macy the loquacious was the first to speak aloud.

"H-m! Ha!" he began. "You say you have a monopoly of the hotel business hereabouts, eh? One moment, good Boniface!

This fair lady and I are not picayunish. We would require food of fair quality in sufficient quantity; drink, the same; and decently comfortable lodging—nothing lavish or luxurious, but respectable. We don't ask the price, because the price, to us, is nothing which can give us concern. What is a thousand dollars, or even a million dollars, between good sportsmen and good friends? Pish, tush, *monsieur of ze gr-rear chapeau*, forget it!"

"Meaning, I take it, you-all wouldn't want to stop at my place?"

"Pardon, good sir, meaning nothing of the kind. We'll be pleased to stop at your place, my droll friend, until—well, say until further notice. Please consider us as having engaged your bridal suite, with all the fancy trimmings, indefinitely."

"Hop in, then," the other said, brightening, "while I look along the track for a caddy of keen-spitting they was to fling off the train for me. Then we'll split the breeze."

Macy and Macy clambered up—the lady to share the driver's seat, her connubial and commercial associate to sit on a suit-case on the after deck. The box of tobacco, having been discovered half-buried in sand, was disinterred and placed under the wagon seat. Great Hat mounted, clucked to his steeds, and the split breeze murmured past their ears as it streamed rearward on either side.

When they had gone five miles or so, the driver cracked into speech.

"My name's Henry Clay Perkins," he said over his left shoulder. "However, I'm generally called Spotshot by them that knows me, on account of the way I handle a six-gun."

"Ah!" The deck passenger started nervously, and nearly lost his clutch on the seat back. "Delighted to meet you," he said ingratiatingly. "My name is Macy—Percy L. Macy, sometimes called Bud. Meet my wife, Mr.—ah—Perkins—Mrs. Macy."

At the end of ten miles, Perkins waved a hand to indicate a boulder which brooded in its bed of sand.

"Half-way," he remarked.

The topography of the country presently changed. The buckboard dipped over a declivity, and the travelers found themselves in the midst of a scenic pot-pourri of upheaved earth and rocks, among which the rays of the sinking sun cast weird and

wonderful lights and shadows. It was a shambles of colors. The conveyance presently rounded one of these craggy, chromatic warts of earth, and Macy and Macy saw a hulking edifice whose roof bore the entitlement in flaring letters:

BOILING SPRINGS HOTEL

The edifice itself was built of logs, stone, adobe, and perhaps other materials. It was a mixture of the nineteenth-century warehouse and the antique Texas haybarn schools of architecture.

"Gramercy!" quoth Bud Macy. "A health resort! A spa, a mineral water-bibbers' joint! A rheumatism reducing-shop! Have you many vic—er—patients stopping with you at present?" he asked the imperturbable Perkins.

"I've seen more and I've seen fewer," that person replied conservatively.

"Umph! The higher the fewer," muttered Macy to Macy in a dubious aside.

"Cold feet don't carve any roast beef," the lady remarked tersely.

III

No one was visible about the hotel. Its spacious veranda was deserted of guests, its staring windows empty of evidences of human occupancy. A vast and breathless silence hung over the whole place.

Perkins steered his equipage to the foot of a flight of wooden steps, and halted.

"Well, here we are, folks," he said brightly. "Light down, and make yourselves right at home. I'll run these here cayuses into the corral and be with you in a couple of shakes."

Macy and Macy proceeded to commune with each other in the interim.

"Nobody around, ha?" said the one. "A rummy-looking outfit, what? It has the wooly look of a foolish-house."

"Bosh, Bud Macy! You're as panicky as a scared rabbit. I'm hungry enough to eat raw lizards. Oof! I only hope the chef hasn't underestimated the crowd for dinner!"

"But listen—we've got to anticipate this Perkins. What if he demands cash in advance? We've no baggage, and only fifty cents."

"Bluff him! Has your portable gas-generating apparatus got out of commission? If it has, that would be strange. Don't begin swelling up, now—I'm not the one you can hope to bluff, deary!"

"Sweet, cease cackling. Ho, I have the big idea! We've your stage jewels—a king's ransom of glittering glass in settings of real yellow brass—all of three dollars' worth, but it lamps like a quarter of a million. By the new gold tooth of Mazuma! I've that fat roll of stage money, too. We'll turn it all over to Perkins for safe-keeping. That will fend off any suggestion of paying in advance. My love, your appreciation is only natural, and I accept it with due modesty. Hist, the poor fish comes!"

Perkins rejoined them. He seemed saddest, if anything, when he smiled.

"I reckon supper 'll be ready purty soon," he opined. "If you-all would like to scrub up a bit, I'll show you where."

He preceded them into a sort of hall carrying their luggage.

"Oh, by the bye!" blandly remarked Macy the inveigler. "Have you a fire-and-burglar-proof safe, mine host?" He spoke in a guarded tone. "We wish to deposit our valuables with you for safe-keeping."

Perkins stared.

"Why, I guess—"

"Excellent! We were a bit worried. We carry a large fortune with us. Your diamonds, pet, your fifty-thousand-dollar tiara; your stomacher and earrings—sh-h!" he warned mysteriously, herding the other into a dim corner. "Just take a peep, landlord, at these and these. Baubles, eh? Don't let 'em dazzle your eyes. Here's a wad of money, too. Take the whole bundle of loot along and keep it until called for. A receipt won't be necessary between honest men."

Perkins took the sparkling gewgaws a little awesomely. His hands were seen to tremble slightly.

"All right!" he said. "I'll keep the truck till you call for it. They ain't much danger of anybody gettin' robbed here, but maybe you folks 'll feel comfortable in your minds—"

He sidled behind a sort of rostrum. Macy telegraphed to Macy by a flick of the eyelash.

"He swallows hook, line, sinker, and cork, my sweet!"

"But did you notice the queer look in his rat eyes?" the lady whispered, when she found an opportunity. "You don't think the man would murder us for that bunch of baubles, do you? This is an out-of-the-way place."

"Od's fish, woman! You have a grisly

imagination! Don't hold that idea in your jelly bean of a head—you'll convey it to him! Murdered! Egad, madam, you make my flesh creep with such morbid talk. This place has the look of a charnel-house. I didn't like the aspect of things the minute I saw it. 'Tis a ticklish situation—a miserable end for a man of genius like me!"

"Who's holding gruesome ideas now, Bud Macy? You make me sick with your timorous fears. Stiffen your spine! Maybe the worst is yet to come."

"Madam, will you cease your chatter? You give me a cold sweat. S-sh—the villain approaches!"

Perkins rejoined them. There seemed to their watchful eyes something furtive and calculating about his mien. He appeared to avoid their gaze. They fancied there was a grim malevolence, a sly ferocity, in the lines of his face.

Macy and Macy made their ablutions in the makeshift lavatory. Perkins stood in silent vigil at the door.

"I reckon supper's about ready," he announced when the pair finished. "Jes' step this way to the dinin'-room."

The guests trailed along a dim hall, and presently entered a large room containing rows of dusty tables and chairs heaped in a jumble along the walls. One table at the rear had evidently been reserved for them. Their guide waved them toward it. No other guests appeared, and none of the other tables was prepared for diners.

Perkins saw them seated and went out at the rear by way of a swinging door. He shortly returned carrying a tin tray holding various dishes of food, which he placed before the lady. A second trip brought a similar arrangement for Macy *homme*. The meal consisted of one complete course—fried bacon, cold boiled beans, fried potatoes, huge yellow biscuits, and black coffee, scalding hot.

Bud Macy balanced one of the heavy biscuits in a dubious hand.

"They asked for bread and were given a stone," he muttered.

His connubial companion made no comment. She proceeded to eat what was before her with the avidity of one who is genuinely hungry. Her husband followed her example with somewhat less enthusiasm. His appetite seemed to have fled.

Suddenly he clutched his partner's shapeless arm in a spasmodic grip. For a moment his eyes rolled and his mouth opened and

shut, but he was inarticulate from an emotion strongly resembling panic terror.

He pointed a shaking finger at one of the windows, whose besmudged glass let in the gray light of the approaching evening.

"Some—somebody was peeking in at us!" he chattered huskily. "I saw his face—the face of a murderous cutthroat, black-browed, with a long, drooping mustache. 'Twasn't Perkins—'twas somebody else. It was a face to make your hair stand on end, ma'am. Egad, the cold chills are playing tag up and down my spine!"

"You're scared silly," the lady reassured him. "It was probably one of the cowboys or kitchen helpers, or maybe another guest. Don't lose your goat to the first comer, Bud Macy!"

"I—I'm not well," her companion complained. "Excitement and exposure in this devil's country have sapped my indomitable spirit."

The lady rose and led the way from the dusk-shadowed room. The saturnine Perkins met them in the hall. He had come in by way of the front entrance, it seemed. Mrs. Macy pushed past him and hurried out upon the empty veranda. A figure astride a spotted horse was departing at a gallop along the winding, sandy trail.

"It might be you folks would like to go up to your room," the hotel proprietor mumbled. "If so, I'll show you the way."

The couple exchanged wireless signals, and expressed their willingness to follow the other's suggestion. He accordingly shambled ahead of them up a flight of stairs and along a dim corridor, uncarpeted, which echoed to their footsteps with a sepulchral, hollow sound. They passed rows of closed doors, behind which reigned unbroken and boding silence.

At the end of the shadowy hall Perkins stopped, and, turning a knob, opened a door. He stood at one side to let them enter.

"This here's two rooms connectin'," he remarked with some unction. "They's a bathroom, but the pipes ain't workin'. We'll see about some scheme to fetch up the water in buckets if you-all decide you want to take a wash. These here winders opens out right on the cañon. It's about five hundred feet straight down. They's drinkin' water in the pitcher, and I've toted up your grips. I reckon you-all will be about ready to hit the hay pretty soon. I'll say good night."

He stepped softly through the doorway and closed the door behind him. The lock clicked rather suggestively.

IV

"HE locked the door!" whispered Bud Macy, in the same tragic accent that he would have employed to say: "He has set fire to the building!"

"Nonsense—he didn't!"

Mrs. Macy crossed the room and tried the knob. The door was indeed fastened, and there was no key in the lock.

They hurriedly made an inspection of the two rooms. No apparent means of egress offered, except through the one portal and two outside windows. The view from these last gave only a dizzy glimpse into a chasm whose bottom was lost in uncertain shadows. They were prisoners—at the questionable mercy of the saturnine and possibly unscrupulous Perkins!

But if they were trapped like a pair of flies in this spider's web, they were not yet trussed up hand and foot and physically helpless. They proceeded to pile the furniture of the two chambers against the door, and to prepare to die fighting.

The hours dragged by without incident. An utter, grave-like silence reigned in the house—a soundlessness so profound that their ears throbbed with it. Once they fancied there was the rustle of a furtive footfall in the corridor, and they rose to stand at bay—but nothing happened.

They slept poorly in snatches, standing watches in turn until midnight. After that oblivion claimed both.

The sun had risen when they awoke, and daylight restored their confidence somewhat. They rearranged the furniture.

"My love," said Bud Macy, "be of good cheer and stouten your heart. If we're in a tight place, I am equal to it. Forewarned is forearmed."

"If you were only four-wheeled," said his wife, "and they had invented a flivver that would run on hot air, we might have a chance to beat it. Cut the come-back—I hear footprints approaching."

The lock clicked guardedly, and the door swung open. The sadly smiling visage of Perkins came into view.

"Good mornin', folks!" he said. "I reckon you-all slept sound and woke up keen for breakfast. She's waitin' for you down-stairs."

The man's mien was innocent of all cunning or guile.

He appeared wholly harmless, exuding only homely and kindly good cheer; but Macy and Macy observed certain bulges at the back of his coat which indicated the presence of a pair of "six-guns" on his person—deadly weapons with which he had already professed to have some knack.

They trailed in his wake down the stairs into the dining-room. Breakfast of bacon, coffee, biscuits, and fried potatoes was served. Macy and Macy ate sparingly, eschewing the sprightly usages of conversation the while.

"Would it be convenient to send a few telegrams?" inquired Macy *homme* of the imperturbable Perkins.

"Well, no, not to-day," that person returned calmly. "If you'd 'a' mentioned it last night, now, it might 've been fixed up; but I don't see no way since you didn't speak about it."

"H-m! We've just about decided to leave you to-day, landlord," Bud ventured tentatively. "If you'll harness up your ponies and drive us to the railroad in time to catch the east-bound train—"

"I reckon I cain't do that to-day," Perkins said mildly. "The cayuses is gone for the day. They won't be back till about dark to-night."

"Ha! My dear, I suppose we'll be compelled to walk, then," Macy said meaningly to Macy.

"I couldn't think of lettin' you-all do that," Perkins objected.

"Sir, you can't stop us! You have no authority over our persons. I grant you the legal right to detain our luggage under certain contingencies, but you cannot restrict our personal liberties."

"Oh, cain't I?" the other returned, frowning. "Come out on the porch a minute, both of you two. I want to give you a practical idee of the only law we bother with out here in this country. Set down in a chair, ma'am, and rest yourself. I'm goin' to give you-all a little sample of my expertness with shootin'-irons!"

The hotel-keeper sauntered out upon the open space below. He produced a common potato from his pocket and tossed it into the air. As the tuber lost momentum in its upward flight, by some unaccountable and lightning-like process a heavy revolver appeared in the man's hand. *Crack*—and the potato flew in halves.

A second gun materialized in his left

hand. *Crack, crack*—and the falling fragments of vegetable dissolved into pulp.

He tossed up two potatoes and shattered both with simultaneous shots. He set up a row of tin cans and punctured them with a fusillade from both guns so rapid as to sound like a single report. He set two cans forty paces apart. Standing midway, he riddled both at once.

He slipped his revolvers into their holsters and tossed a can far behind him. Whirling and drawing on the instant, he placed a bullet from each revolver through the target before it dropped to earth. He stuck a playing-card—the ace of clubs—against a rock fifty yards off. Four shots, and the card appeared as the five of clubs, a round hole punctured in each of the four corners.

"They call me Spotshot Perkins," he grinned. "I could notch your ears all round the edges with these here guns, I reckon, if I took a notion," he told Bud Macy. "I'm pretty handy with a Winchester, too," he added. "A rifle's mainly for long shootin', though. I'll show you what I mean."

He brought a repeating rifle from the hotel office. Then he set off down the trail, carrying a tin can, which he placed on a jutting rock seemingly a quarter of a mile from the veranda steps. Returning, he lifted the rifle. Two quick shots resounded. Macy and Macy heard the faint *tink-tink* of two hits—one while the can rested inert, and the second after it had bounded into the air.

"I don't reckon you'd expect to hike out afoot and get very far, if I was minded to stop you, now," he suggested pleasantly. "You-all better decide to stay!"

V

Macy and Macy sat silent and subdued on the veranda during the greater part of the morning. The hours dragged. Perkins announced dinner at noon. There were yellow biscuits and boiled beans; no bacon; hot, black coffee. They dined in solitary state.

The afternoon was a week long. Perkins did not intrude upon their gloomy meditations, but they heard his dry cough at intervals not far away. He was doubtless keeping a watchful eye upon their movements.

Toward sundown a man riding a spotted horse came up the trail. He drew rein and

sat eying the couple with baleful glance, a little way off. He was a villainous-looking, black-mustached creature with all the earmarks of desperadodom about him. Perkins sauntered forth, and the pair conferred at length just out of ear-shot. Their conversation was marked by heated passages at times, but they parted in a sort of coldly non-committal amity.

As the dusk of evening deepened, a wagon hove in sight, driven at a fast clip. It clattered up and disappeared round the rear of the building.

"Od's bodkins!" muttered Bud Macy hollowly. "Did you see that man, my love? An Indian savage, no less! And did you get a look at what he had in the wagon? Two coffins, ma'am! To-night is to be our last night on earth. What shall we do? Are you going to sit here and be murdered willy-nilly?"

"S-sh! Here comes the spot-shooter. We must take him unawares."

Perkins appeared.

"Supper 'll be a little bit late," he began.

Just then Mrs. Macy descended upon him swiftly and summarily from behind. She pinioned both his arms in a fierce hug that almost cracked his ribs as well.

"Get his pistols!" she hissed. "Get his pistols, Bud, and we've got him! Now, Mr. Perkins, one yelp out of you and it 'll be good night and good-by. Give me one of those guns, deary. I can't shoot the spots off a card, but I can hit a man!"

"Be careful with that six-gun!" begged Perkins abjectly. "Lord A'mighty, but them things is dangerous when you handle 'em reckless-like, thataway. Keep calm, folks! Don't get excited, and maybe we can come to an understandin'."

"Understanding is the word," agreed Mrs. Macy. "You speak up and explain a few things. What's your game? What kind of a dirty scheme are you up to? Are you fixing to rob and murder us for our stage jewelry—is that it?"

"Lord bless you, ma'am!" Perkins stared with down-dropped jaw. "Rob you of them glass diamonds and that funny money you gave me to keep? Great snakes, no! I wasn't fooled with that stuff, not for a minute. Just kind of ease off center with that there shootin'-iron—just a couple of inches like, so's to quiet my nerves, and I'll 'fess up the whole plot. It wasn't ag'in' you folks at all. It was ag'in' old Sourbug Stivers."

"Sour—who?" the lady demanded. "No tricks, now!"

"Maybe you-all noticed a man on a pin-to boss that rid up here to-day? Well, that was Sourbug Stivers. Him and me used to be partners prospectin'. When we was pore and honest and hard-workin', he was a likable person, Sourbug was. A while ago we struck it rich, sold out for half a million, and settled down to retire, as you might denominate it. I went and bought these springs and hotel as a means of livelihood in my old age, and Sourbug made fun of me. He said I'd wind up in the almshouse, and a lot more. He's always hooted at the idee of me ever havin' any boarders here, and by jicky, he didn't miss it much! Once a man stopped for dinner, but he rid on before night. And then yesterday, when I went over to the railroad, I met you and brought you in. Sourbug happened past last night whilst you was at supper, and him and me made a bet. He bet you wouldn't be here twenty-four hours, and I bet you would. We put up a thousand dollars. I was just about run out of grub, so I sent Piute Pete—he's my cook and general assistant—to Quartz City for an outfit of supplies. I ordered canned peaches, plums, pickles, tunny-fish, and all kinds of fixin's for high-toned company. Pete got in a few minutes ago with a full line of truck, and if you-all will be patient we'll have a bang-up supper right soon."

"And you've won the thousand!" burbled Bud Macy: "We've been here twenty-four hours."

"Yep! I did do an underhand trick last night. I locked you-all into your room, just for to make certain; but I didn't hold you by force. I said to myself, if you made

a holler, I'd let you out. And if you'd 'a' called my bluff to-day when I showed off my fancy shootin', you could 'a' walked away for all of me. The pretty part is I got old Sourbug riled this afternoon when he stopped. I tantalized him considerable, and he offered to bet me five thousand that you-all wouldn't stay here a week under no consideration whatever. He wormed out of me that I locked you-all in last night, and he made it a condition that I shouldn't do that agin. He said nothin' short of force could make you stay; and I took the old galoot up."

"And we're free to go if we like?" Macy and Macy questioned in a breath.

"Ye-eh, of course—but I might add that if you could see your way clear to stickin' it out, there'd be no charge for board and room, and I'd agree to splittin' the profits with you, say in ekal parts—half to you-all and half to me. I'd like to learn old Sourbug a real lesson!"

Macy and Macy exchanged wireless signals.

"We are offered a short-time contract at twenty-five hundred a week—easy work and no expenses. What's the word?"

"Nail it, heart of my heart, nail it!"

"I—I imagine it would be polite to give Mr. Perkins back his pistols, my love," Bud Macy murmured faintly. "Sir, you are a fairy prince and a gentleman. Your hand, my friend! We accept your offer without reservation."

"Lay the guns over there in the corner. I reckon I won't need 'em soon again, anyways. Here's the key to your rooms. You-all know the way to the wash-room. I'll skirmish out and help Pete hustle the supper!"

PUZZLES IN PROVERBS

PARADOXES oft I find

As I over proverbs ponder;

"Out of sight is out of mind,"

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

"Look before you leap" one hears

Frequently as a restriction.

"Never cross a bridge" appears,

After that, a contradiction!

Can it ever be explained?

If so, then I ask you how, sir?

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained"—

"Patience is a virtue!" Now, sir?

Harold Seton

The Trail of Conflict*

A MODERN ROMANCE OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE IN EAST
AND WEST

By Emilie Loring

Author of "The Key to Many Doors," etc.

STEPHEN COURTLANDT, son of Peter Courtlandt, and representative of a famous old New York family, marries Geraldine Glamorgan, daughter of Daniel Glamorgan, a self-made millionaire with social ambitions, who holds a mortgage on the ancestral property of the Courtlands. Stephen has had a transient love-affair with Felice Peyton, now married to Phil Denbigh, and Geraldine—known as Jerry to her friends—has been engaged to Bruce Greyson, but she and young Courtlandt take their marriage vows loyally, though their relations are only those of friendly courtesy.

A new chapter in their lives begins when Stephen Courtlandt's rich uncle, old Nicholas Fairfax, dies and leaves his property to his nephew on certain rather strange conditions. These are that Stephen and his wife shall live for a year on Fairfax's ranch in Wyoming, the Double O, and that during that time Mrs. Courtlandt shall accept no money from her father. Stephen at first refuses the legacy on such terms, but his wife—in spite of Daniel Glamorgan's bitter opposition—insists that he shall accept it, and they start for Wyoming.

VIII

WITH each stop of the transcontinental train rain-coated men, with occasionally a woman, entered the car and passed down the corridor to disappear into one of the compartments. Porters wearing an air of authority and responsibility for which one might justly look in a premier or secretary of state, came and went. Conductors punched tickets and answered questions more or less amiably. The wheels rattled and roared and ground ceaselessly. Outside, the rain descended with a persistence worthy a better cause.

From the window of her compartment Geraldine Courtlandt looked out upon a drenched world. There was nothing to see save a dense white sheet ten feet beyond the window. In an hour she and Steve would reach their destination—the first stop on the detour, she thought with a sudden mist before her eyes.

She hoped that the storm was not an omen of what lay before them. She shook herself mentally.

"Don't be silly and superstitious," she admonished that Jerry Courtlandt who persisted in having a queer, lumpy feeling in

her throat whenever she thought of the curious twist the apparently broad, straight road of her marriage had taken.

Her father had maintained his attitude of angry aloofness. He had not come to the station to see her off. She had waited on the platform until the train started, hoping that he would relent at the last moment. He had sent a curt typewritten note telling her that if she and Steve regained their common sense, and returned to Courtlandt Manor before the end of the year, he would double the income he had allowed them.

There were a dozen glorious American beauties in her compartment when she entered it. The flowers had set the atmosphere tingling with life and color and love. Jerry laughed happily and kissed each one of them. How like her father it was to write such a note with one hand and send roses with the other!

What difference would it make if her income were doubled, if she were disloyal to the promise she made when she married Steve? So the girl reflected as, with her chin on her hand, she gazed unseeingly out at the rain.

"An easy conscience is more to be desired than great riches," she paraphrased

* Copyright, 1921, by Emilie Loring—This story began in the December (1921) number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

to herself, as she thought of the weeks when she had been engaged to Greyson. Her heart still smarted with contrition as she remembered how ashamed she had been that she could make so little response to the love he lavished upon her.

"Never again!" she said aloud. "I've made two mistakes—Bruce and Steve. From now on I'll do what I know to be right, even if I hurt some one else, and however much I may hate doing it. But—but just what shall I do for money?" she questioned with puckered brows.

She opened her beaded bag and poured the contents into her lap.

"How are the mighty fallen!" she quoted with a laugh, as she looked down upon the collection displayed.

A handkerchief, one gold pencil, the key to her safe-deposit box, the membership card of her club, a book of postage-stamps—nothing else. She had carried out the terms of the will in letter and spirit. After her bills had been paid she had transferred her bank balance to her father, and had dropped her remaining cash into the box of a Salvation Army lassie as she entered the station to take the west-bound train. The woman in the red-banded poke bonnet, standing on a board to keep her stout boots from the dampness, had looked at the bills crushed into her box, then after the donor, incredulously. Such lavish generosity was new in her experience.

Jerry frowningly regarded the objects in her lap. Not one cent of money!

"Being marooned on a desert island has nothing on being marooned on a ranch without a penny," she mused under her breath.

She hastily stuffed her belongings back into her bag as she heard an approaching whistle, which she recognized as Steve's.

The queer merry-go-round of fortune had accomplished one thing—it had restored Steve's spirits. Since leaving New York he had been a different person from the morose, touchy individual she had known since her engagement to him. He had been companionable and sympathetic in a fraternal sort of way which had made her wish fervently that fate had given her a brother instead of a husband.

"Won't you come in?" she asked, as Courtlandt stopped at the open door. "Is it time to get on my coat?" she added, as he entered.

"Not for half an hour."

He seated himself opposite her. There was a new expression in his eyes which set the girl's heart to beating uncomfortably. She couldn't define it. She couldn't meet it long enough to define it.

"Jerry"—there was a "tention, company," note in his voice which brought her chin up defiantly—"I suppose, if you complied with the terms of Uncle Nick's will, you must be rather down and out financially—yes?"

She succumbed to the lure of his smile and the laughter in his eyes.

"Mental telepathy!" she responded gaily. "I was taking account of stock when you appeared. I have in this bag one pencil, one handkerchief, one perfectly good club-membership card—good, that is, until the end of December—and a book of two-cent stamps. Those stamps won't imperil our hopes of the inheritance, will they?" she asked with exaggerated anxiety. "Caleb Lawson held me up before I boarded the train. I had to sign a paper and show him my empty purse to prove that I was really the beggar maid, bare-pursed instead of barefooted, following my *King Cophetua* out into the cold, cold world!"

"Your smile is faulty. As I remember it, the beggar maid loved the king."

"Also the king loved the beggar maid. You're right—the similarity ceases with my lack of funds."

"I shall open an account for you in the bank at Slippery Bend. Until then—"

His hand went to his pocket. The girl's face whitened.

"Don't offer me money, Steve," she commanded tensely.

"I'm not offering money. I am giving you what belongs to you. Aren't you earning what Uncle Nick left, as well as I?"

"Weren't you earning your share of father's money when you married me?"

"That's different."

"Why? You refused to take my money. I refuse to take yours."

"You will take it!"

Jerry leaned forward, her face as colorless as his.

"Take that 'hands up' expression out of your eyes, Steve! I shall not touch a cent of your money. You will find that a Glamorgan has as much pride as a Courtlandt, if she hasn't several generations of aristocrats behind her!"

Her angry eyes blazed as he retorted laughingly:

"You forget—you're not a Glamorgan now."

She shrugged lightly.

"More's the pity!"

"Do you mean that?" Consternation banished the smile from his lips. He caught her hands in his. "The day Uncle Nick arrived I heard you say—"

"Nex' stop Slippery Bend, miss. Porter for your bags?" interrupted a Jamaican voice with a Chicago accent.

Jerry's face flushed with relief as the black head with its gleaming eyes and teeth bobbed in at the door. She pointed to the bags. As the man went out with them, she turned to Courtlandt with an embarrassed laugh.

"You've won this time, Steve! I had forgotten the porter. You'll have to tip him and the maid for me. However, as this is really a deferred wedding-trip, the expenses naturally fall to the groom, don't they?" she said with reckless daring.

He looked at her until her laughing eyes fell before the glow of his.

"You're right—if this can be called a wedding-trip; but take it from me that some time, Mrs. Courtlandt, I'll show you what a real honeymoon can be! Porter, here's another bag."

He followed the black man into the corridor. Jerry settled her smart toque and pinned on her veil before the mirror; but she couldn't see her own face. She saw only Steve's, with that curious "I'm biding my time" look in his eyes.

What had he meant about a honeymoon? Did he mean that he and Felice might—no, no, Steve was not that kind!

She looked about the compartment, to make sure that she had left nothing. Three roses still glowing with beauty remained of the dozen. She pinned them to the front of her coat. She would take so much of her father into her new life with her!

The wooden shanty which served as a shelter for freight and passengers at Slippery Bend was as depressing as rain, flapping shingles, and a skewed roof could make it. The road which struggled up a slope to hide between two shabby buildings was a river of mud. A knock-kneed man, with a string of slat-ribbed calico horses and cayuses following him, waded townward through the middle of it. Every few steps he would stop to yank a howling, red-eyed bulldog from a hole which had betrayed him.

Jerry valiantly blinked back the tears as she watched him. She had never seen anything quite as sordid and depressing as her surroundings. The only note of civilization in the dreary scene was the large, curtained touring-car by the platform.

As she looked at it, two legs, which had acquired Queen Anne curves from many hours spent in the saddle, wriggled from under the curtains, followed by a large body. A Belgian police dog, tawny, noble, aloof, followed the man. Courtlandt, who had been busy with the luggage, turned with a boyish laugh and held out his hand.

"It sure is great to be back, Pete! Down, Goober, down, boy!"—to the dog, which, after an uncertain second, had leaped to lick his face.

He kept one hand on the animal's head as he turned to the girl beside him.

"Jerry, this is Pete Gerrish, who taught me all I know about ranching. He is Uncle Nick's right-hand man. Pete, this is Mrs. Courtlandt."

"He's got me wrong, ma'am. I was the old gentleman's right-hand man, but Ranellett's in the saddle now. I'm pleased to meet you, an' I hope you'll be happy here."

"Thank you, Mr. Gerrish."

Jerry felt the tears absurdly near as she looked up at the big man. He was regarding her with unqualified approval. His large face was cross-currented with fine lines and smiles; his Stetson came close to ears which looked as if the Almighty had designed them as hat-rests, and had made a surprisingly good job of it. He carried the marks of his calling in the devil-may-care poise of his body, in his clothing, in his rollicking Irish eyes.

"I'll give Baldy Jennings a hand with the trunks, to get 'em out of the rain till the boys get here for them. They're team-in' in. How the devil did you expect to get all them things out to the ranch over these spring roads, Steve—chief, I would say? The boys has decided that even if they did teach the new owner most of what he knows about ranching, it won't do to be familiar-like no more; so we're going to call him 'chief,' ma'am." Gerrish inserted this bit of information for Jerry into the midst of his dissertation on the condition of the roads. "I went up to the hubs getting here with no load. By cripes, I don't know what 'll happen going back!"

Jerry shared his anxiety, a little later, when the big car, laboring through what

seemed rivers of mud, foundered in a hole. She unfastened the curtain and looked out. Goober on the running-board, plastered with mud, looked like nothing so much as a model sketchily done in clay. Gerrish was expressing himself in language which the girl was sure was being painfully expurgated because of her.

The wheels groaned and choked as they churned up fountains of mud. As she watched the wheel under her, Jerry could think of nothing but a gigantic egg-beater gone mad from the futility of its efforts. The back of Gerrish's neck had taken on a dangerous, apoplectic color—generated, doubtless, by restraint from his usual liberty of self-expression.

"Would it help if I got out?" she ventured in the lull while the engine rested.

"Haw! I guess, if you did, we'd have to haul you out in a hurry, or send a rescue-party through to China!" Gerrish discouraged her.

"Stay where you are!" commanded Steve. "I'll take the wheel, Pete. We have nothing to put under the back wheels, and it would do no good if we had. The engine will have to do the trick."

He threw on the switch, and the engine started. The spinning wheels hitched forward; he reversed, hitched forward, reversed, hitched forward, till Jerry experienced all the discomforts, and none of the stimulation, of being aboard ship on a high and choppy sea.

Courtlandt grimly pursued his tactics till, with a roar from the motor and a lurch which sent Jerry's teeth into her lower lip, the car dragged itself from the hole. Looking like an uncanny prehistoric animal which had been wallowing in a mud bath, it skidded sidewise with hair-raising irresponsibility, came back to the road, and struggled on.

The rain stopped. The sky showed shapeless spots of light where the clouds were thinning. Vapors floated lightly above the fields.

It was twilight—a crimson and gold twilight—when Courtlandt turned into the avenue of cottonwoods which led to the ranch-house of the Double O. The air was fragrant with the scent of fresh-washed earth and the spicy breath which the storm had beaten from the pines. From somewhere a meadow-lark trilled an ecstatic greeting, and, as if frightened at its temerity, as suddenly subsided.

The flaming color in the west might have been the glow from a blazing forest, but it was only the sun flinging its last salute over sky and fields and mountains in the whole-hearted Western way. Against the red light squatted the shadowy shape of the ranch-house.

When the car stopped, Goober sprang to the porch and stood as if awaiting orders. In the background hovered two Chinese servants, a man and a woman. Their slant eyes and moon faces were ludicrously alike. The woman, in her gay silks and embroideries, looked like a painting on rice-paper.

Pete and Hopi Soy carried in the bags. At a nod from Courtlandt the woman followed. Steve held the door wide, and with a curious choked feeling Jerry entered the house.

Her emotion found vent in a little cry of delight. After the grayness and mud of the ride out, the great living-room glowed like a jewel. The color stole through her senses like an elixir, and rested and refreshed her. Her eyes shone, her lips curved in a smile as she looked about her.

The servants had disappeared. She and Steve were alone.

Logs blazed in the great stone fireplace. Safely out of scorching distance a white cat dozed in front of it, her fluffy coat rosy in the firelight, her wide eyes like blinking topaz as she regarded the newcomers. Gorgeous serapes from old Mexico, Hopi saddle-blankets, heavily beaded garments of the Blackfeet, Apache bows and quivers full of arrows, Navajo blankets, skins of mountain lions and lynx there were, each one placed in artistic relation to its neighbor. A profusion of books and magazines, a baby-grand piano, a phonograph *de luxe*, softly shaded lamps, added their note of civilization to the array of savage trophies, and over the mantel—

"Why, Steve! There's *mother*!" whispered Jerry softly.

For a silent moment the man and the girl, standing side by side, looked up at the tender, laughing face of the woman in riding-costume. She didn't seem like a thing of paint and canvas; she was real, vital, alive, and welcoming. Jerry was the first to stir. She colored with confusion.

"Steve, I—I beg your pardon. I—I shouldn't have called her mother; but I was so—so surprised. It seemed for a moment as if she was holding out welcoming arms to me."

She turned away. Courtlandt gripped her shoulders with a force that hurt.

"She is your mother! I—" He released her abruptly, and threw open a door. "These are your rooms. Mine are opposite. You see, we have but one story in the ranch-house. Your bags are in your room. Ming Soy will come to help you when you ring." He put his two hands on her shoulders again. "I'm glad that you wore my roses!"

"Your roses! Why, I thought—I thought—"

Her voice was drenched with disappointment. Steve's face was a mask. Only his eyes seemed alive as he removed his hands and asked crisply:

"That they came from Greyson?"

"No, Steve, *no!* How could you think such a thing? I thought that dad had relented and—and had sent the roses to—"

She winked her lashes furiously, but not before Steve had seen the diamond-like drops that beaded them. His voice was tender as he comforted her.

"Your father will come round, Jerry. Just believe with old Doc Rand that things have a way of coming marvelously, unbelievably right. You are not sorry that you came, are you?"

"No, Steve—I'm not!"

She had essayed an imitation of his voice and words, but the emotion which had threatened her all day surged in her heart and betrayed her. Steve caught her hands in his.

"Don't look like that, little girl! You're going to love the life here and the ranch and—and—and Goober," he added, with a short laugh, as the dog bounded into the room.

IX

JERRY COURTLANDT sent her horse up the slope and came out on a bluff above the Double O.

As the girl sat motionless, looking off over the plain, an artist might have labeled the picture she made "A Study in Browns," before he slipped it into his mental portfolio. Her mount, Patches, was a deep mahogany in color, her riding-boots were but a shade lighter than his satin skin. Her breeches and long coat were of khaki, her blouse was fawn-color. Her eyes were deeply, darkly bronze, and rebellious tendrils of lustrous brown hair escaped from under the broad brim of the campaign hat

she wore—one of Steve's army hats, with its gold and black cord.

He had insisted upon her using it. The hats she had brought to the ranch had been urban affairs, not designed to shade her eyes from the glare of white roads. As she had no money with which to buy another, she had taken it.

Jerry pulled off the soft hat as she took a deep breath of the glorious air, sparkling with bubbles of life. She loved this spot. Every day that she rode she stopped here to look down upon the valley.

Far away among the foot-hills a silver stream cleft rocky bluffs, then coiled and foamed its way until it broadened and flashed in gleaming waterfalls. In places where it boiled and frothed, rustic bridges had been thrown across. Toward the east lay the sturdily built stock corrals, store-houses spick and span with whitewash, towering silos. Toward the west were fenced-off fields of alfalfa; and beyond them a mosaic of varicolored pasture-lands, dotted with grazing herds, stretched out to the foot-hills.

Beyond the foot-hills loomed mountains darkly green with pine and spruce to the timber-line. Above that level rose somber, forbidding rocks, and still higher, against the ragged edge of gold-lined clouds, white peaks flamed crimson in the slanting sun.

Toward the north she could see the gap in the mountains through which the railroad cut. The gap was known as the Devil's Hold-Up, because of the natural facilities it had offered—and still offered, for that matter—to the bold fraternity whose pleasing pastime it had been to maintain their divine right in other men's property at the point of a gun.

Almost beneath her, approached by a broad, well-graded road, lay the ranch-house. Telephone-wires from all directions rounded up the activities of the Double O at the office near by. The house was a rambling structure of rudely squared timbers set in field stone and cement. Its one story was built around a court, on which many doors opened, and which, on this late June day, was gaily brocaded with shrubs and plants in blossom.

Where was Steve, Jerry wondered, as her eyes lingered on the office building? She saw him less and less as the days passed, as more and more he assumed the responsibilities of the Double O. He was off before she was up in the morning, riding the range,

or busy in the dairies, the barns, or the stock corrals, until night.

She had hardly believed her eyes when, on the evening after her arrival, she had seen Steve and Tommy Benson, his secretary, come into the living-room in dinner coats. Courtlandt had answered her unspoken question with the explanation that it had been Nicholas Fairfax's unvarying rule to shed ranch problems at night, and he had found that getting into the dress of the city helped him to do it. A man would naturally curb an impulse to toddle down to the corral if he were in dinner clothes. The two didn't seem to go together.

Steve had appointed Tommy Benson her squire, he himself had so little time to give her. A laugh curved Jerry's lips as she thought of Tommy. He was a slight youth, with a face of one of Raffael's cherubs grown up, and with a book for his inseparable companion. His almost yellow hair was short and wavy, his eyes were a brilliant blue, his skin was as nearly pink and white as human skin can be after it has been ranch-seasoned. His lips seemed made for laughter.

He and Steve had been officers in the same company, and when they returned from overseas the two had gone to the ranch to recuperate. Tommy had remained there to please his mother. He was in the throes of a virulent attack of stage fever, and Mrs. Benson had begged him to wait a few years before he decided upon acting as his career. She had assured him that if, after reflection, he still felt that it was the profession for him, she would attend his première without a qualm. So he had stayed at the Double O. There was plenty of money behind him, and he had apparently grown to love the ranch life.

Tommy was taking the responsibility of training the lady of the ranch seriously—that is, as seriously as a boy could who was forever expressing his emotions and convictions in the words of the immortals, Jerry thought with a smile. He was teaching her to shoot and rope. She had ridden since she was a little girl, but Tommy was making her proficient in some hair-raising stunts.

Steve didn't know of the stunts, but he had ordained that she was to learn to saddle Patches, that she must be able to fasten and unfasten gates while mounted, and that she was to rope and shoot from her horse's back.

Her days were full, but filled with her own pleasures. She did nothing for others, she thought ruefully, as she gazed down upon the smoke rising from the cook-house chimney. Her only link with the outside world was Sandy, the carrier, whose appearance sent her imagination winging into the past whenever she saw him.

The queer little postman wore a tall gray hat. Tommy Benson insisted that it was a left-over from the wardrobe of Gentleman Rick, whose zeal as a promoter of pleasure in Slippery Bend, in the nineties, had lured men through miles of wilderness. Jerry often sat on the wall beside the mail-box to await his coming. He always had news and a quaint bit of philosophy, if he hadn't letters.

Letters! There weren't so very many for her. She had had a host of friends in school and college, but she seldom heard from them now. Her conscience administered a vicious pinch. Yes, it was all her fault, she answered it. The girls had apparently adored her, but she had been unable to accept their devotion with single-minded pleasure. In the back of her mind skulked the ghost of that first home near the coal-fields. Would they have cared for her could they have seen that?

After her marriage events had moved too rapidly for her to pick up the scattered lines of her correspondence. However, she no longer had that excuse, for her days now were long and uneventful. She would write to every friend she had. It would be like sending out a fleet of ships. How eagerly she would await the return cargoes!

She broke into her own good resolutions with a laugh. To send out letters one must have stamps. She had used the last one she possessed yesterday, and to get more she must have money.

"Money!"

Jerry laughed again as she repeated the word aloud. Conditions were reversed now as to money, she thought as she stared unseeingly off at the mountain-tops that pricked the crimsoning sky. Steve had the income from his uncle's large property as long as he remained on the ranch. It would not be his unreservedly until a year from the day they had arrived at the Double O. Jerry had persistently refused to accept money from him.

If she wrote to the girls, she would need a regiment of postage-stamps. If she could earn—

Her eyes flashed earthward from the mountains as she heard the click of a hoof against rock and the creak of saddle leather. A horse and rider topped the slope. It was Courtlandt on his favorite mount, Blue Devil, a horse all spirit, shining blue-black satin. He was a regal creature from his flowing mane to his silken fetlock. He nosed Patches, who showed an undignified haste to snuggle up to him in return.

"Did you think you had lost me, Steve?" Jerry asked gaily, as she noted the seriousness of his blue eyes and the crease in his forehead, which his broad-brimmed Stetson was not drawn low enough to hide.

How unnecessarily good-looking he was in his riding-clothes, she thought! He wore a black tie with his khaki shirt. His heavy riding-breeches were tucked into the tops of high boots, which laced up the front and had curious sloping heels. He had removed one of his riding-gloves, and the dark stone of his ring, which bore the seal of the Courtlandts, made the browned hand seem white in contrast.

He gave the impression of being absolute master of his horse and of any situation which might arise. Jerry's heart unaccountably skipped a beat as he answered her question.

"No, I saw you from the road. You looked like one of Dallin's bronzes. Where is Tommy?" he added with quick displeasure.

"Don't glower. I sent him back. I don't want him always at my heels. I love to come up here alone and, figuratively speaking, look down upon my blessings."

"Was that what you were doing when I came up? If it was, your expression belied you. Instead of looking beatific, you looked worried."

She laughed up at him with warm friendliness as she bent forward and confided in a theatrical whisper:

"You are right—I was figuring finances. I have just—"

The color flew to her face as she thought of what he might infer. She stumbled on, quite conscious that she was making matters worse.

"I'm about at the end of my stamp-book. I've developed a sudden fervor for letter-writing, and—and—"

She broke off her breathless explanation as he laid his finely shaped hand on her saddle-bow. Even back in the Courtlandt Manor days his hands had fascinated her.

"I'm glad that you've brought up the subject of finances, Jerry. The money question between you and me must be cleared up, and cleared up *now*. You've had your way long enough. Don't be foolish any longer, little girl! I—"

"I shall not take your money, Steve. Would you take mine?" Then, as his eyes darkened stormily, she went on: "Oh, truly, I didn't mean to rouse sleeping dogs; but—but I won't take it. I do nothing for you. I have nothing to do about the house, for Ming and Hopi Soy run the household motor noiselessly and perfectly. If there was anything I could do—"

"There is something you can do."

Jerry's heart flew to her throat. What did Steve mean? He looked grim and determined.

"W-what is it?" she asked faintly, putting on her hat and unconsciously tightening her reins.

Courtlandt laughed. The sternness left his face. There was an expression in his eyes which she couldn't translate as he teased:

"Don't run, Jerry! You don't trust me overmuch, do you? To return to finances, if you want to help, you can do so tremendously by taking over the accounts and my correspondence. Tommy's had that job, but I need him outside. Ranlett's leaving. You'll soon get the hang of the accounting, and it won't take much of your time."

"If it took all, I'd love to do it, Steve! Shall I have a desk in the office?" she asked eagerly.

"If you agree to accept a salary."

"But I don't want to be paid for helping you."

He turned his horse's head toward the slope.

"That settles it. I shall send to the agency to-morrow for a private secretary." As she did not answer, he looked at her with a smile which lighted eyes and lips. "Now will you do it?"

She regarded him with oblique scrutiny. With an adorable imitation of Pete Gerrish, she drawled:

"You're sure putting it straight, chief! You win. Now shall we mosey 'long home?"

With a touch of her spurs, she wheeled Patches and headed him down the slope.

"Why is Ranlett leaving?" she asked, as their horses trotted side by side along the hard, white ranch road.

Courtlandt's face reddened darkly.

"Because I thought it time to determine the status of the alien on Double O Ranch. Ranlett had a couple of men in the outfit who have not taken out even first naturalization papers, and who have been preaching to my boys about the deficiencies of our government. They're like flares to ignite any chaff of discontent that may be blowing about."

"But you're not against freedom of speech, Steve?"

"You bet I am against the inflammatory brand on the tongue of an alien! What is he in this country but a guest? If a man came to stay in my home, and began a systematic undermining of the ideas and ideals on which that home was built, what do you think I'd do to him?"

"I'll say you'd sure put him out, chief"—with Gerrish's drawl and a little rush of laughter.

"I'll say I would—so quick he'd wonder what struck him! Why should the government put up with such vicious patter? It's bad enough when a citizen breaks loose and turns red, but for a man who is here by courtesy—well, as I remarked before, there is no place for him on the Double O Ranch. Aliens will keep their jobs here only so long as they behave themselves."

"You're right, Steve. I have never thought of agitators in that light, but they are a sort of human slow-match timed to fire a mine of discontent, aren't they? And half the time the mine doesn't know what it is blowing up about. How do the men feel about Ranlett's defection?"

"I haven't asked them. What's the row?" he demanded, as they drew rein at the gate of the court.

Jerry looked at him in surprise. His tone was that of a man whose nerves were taut to snapping-point. She slipped from her horse and dropped the reins. Patches loped quietly but determinedly in the direction of the corral and supper. Blue Devil, with a reproachful glance at the deserter, followed daintily in the steps of his master, as Courtlandt and the girl entered the garden.

The court was a riot of plants and shrubs. The air was sweet with the fragrance of roses just coming into bloom. It was also rent by agitated yelps and a hoarse, croaking voice.

When Jerry and Steve reached storm center, they saw a combination of scarlet,

blue, and green swaying precariously on the top of a shutter. It was José's parrot, Benito, flinging to the breeze the most vituperative epithets a rich and racy vocabulary could suggest. Below him Goober sat on his haunches. Between barks the dog's tongue dripped, his mouth hung open as if in riotous laughter. His tawny eyes flashed ruby light.

Tommy Benson, his finger between the pages of a book, his hair rampant, his blue eyes sparkling with mirth, egged on the two as he quoted from his favorite "Ancient Mariner":

"The wedding guest sat on a stone,
He could not choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed mariner."

His eloquence incited the bird to renewed efforts to express his sentiments. Jerry clapped her hands over her ears and dashed into the house.

Steve whistled. The dog bounded in his direction, his quarry forgotten in the joy of seeing his master. Courtlandt seized him by the collar.

"What do you mean, you sinner?" he demanded sternly.

Goober looked as if he were about to offer an explanation, when the gaudy parrot, who had been rocking back and forth on the shutter, croaked:

"Lick him, bo! Lick him!"

Tommy dropped to the ground and rolled with laughter. José came hurrying out of the house. He swept off his hat with a wide bow. His face had the look of a much shriveled mummy, and his solitary tooth wagged precariously as he talked.

"*Que hay? Señor! One teeng I tell you. It ees that wild devil of a dog that makes my leetle Benito to curse. Madre de Dios, but he ees one—one—*"

"You've said it, José," encouraged Benson, as he sat up, wiped his eyes, and took his knees in an affectionate embrace. "He sure is one little curser, that Benito of yours! Want me to help get him down?"

"No—no, I t'ank you, Señor Tommee. He come to me."

He reached up, and after a few protesting squawks the particolored bird settled on the Mexican's shoulder. As José left the court with him, the parrot shivered, flapped his wings, winked at Tommy, and croaked hoarsely:

"Who's doin' the shootin'?"

Tommy gave vent to a whoop of appreciation before he turned to Courtlandt, who was regarding the ranch-house door unseeing. He gave him a resounding whack on the shoulder as he ranted:

"How is't with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy?"

"Quit your histrionics, Tommy! Has Pete Gerrish been here for me?"

"Nope—nothing doing." Benson stroked Blue Devil's satiny nose and rested his face against it as he asked in a low tone: "Any news of those stray calves?"

Courtlandt's brows met in a quick frown.

"No, but of course we'll find them. It's absurd to think a man can get away with rustling in this enlightened twentieth century, that we've got to revert to shooting and—"

"That's what the majority of the world claimed in 1914," interrupted Benson dryly.

"Don't be a blamed pessimist, Tommy. I'm going to take you off the books and use you outside."

"Oh, boy!" cried Benson in delighted approval. "If you do that, and Ranlett has been crooked, he hasn't a prayer. I'm the original *Sherlock Holmes*. Watch me get him! Pete's boys have all they can do now without turning detectives. You'd think that Gerrish had just been put in charge of a new outfit. He's on location every minute, reestimating the number of head each pasture should carry, weighing up the stock, sifting out the undesirables. Take it from me, old dear, he knows every calf by name, what it's worth now, and what it will bring one year from now. He claims that Ranlett has been underselling. I'll ride the fences to-morrow. If you say the word, I'll take Jerry along, and we'll have a corking time!"

"You and Jerry usually have a corking time together, don't you?"

Benson showed his teeth in a flashing smile.

"I'll say we do. I don't like to talk about myself, but—"

Courtlandt laughed.

"You don't care for yourself one little bit, do you, Tommy? By all means take Jerry if she cares to go. Beat it down to the corral with Blue Devil, will you? That is, if you dare ride him," Steve amended with a laugh.

Tommy mounted with the agility of a

monkey, wheeled his horse, and declaimed theatrically:

"I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none!"

X

JERRY nodded approvingly at the motto that hung above her desk in the ranch office:

Work is the grandest cure for all the maladies and miseries that ever beset mankind.—*Carlyle*.

The quotation had been placed there in Old Nick's day, and was quite as pertinent in her case as it might have been in his. To be sure, their maladies differed. His couldn't by the remotest possibility have been lack of money, she thought with a laugh.

Steve had installed her at her desk two weeks ago and then, presumably, had forgotten her. Tommy Benson had given her some instruction as to her duties, but his attentions were episodic. He was also riding range and acting as general utility man. Ranlett had departed swearing vengeance in the good old nineteenth-century style, and Steve and Gerrish were out from morning till night taking account of stock and checking up.

Neither Tommy nor Steve knew how closely Jerry had remained at her desk. She felt that she must make good, and she must accomplish it without taking too much of Benson's time. As Steve had insisted upon paying her a month's salary in advance, she had surreptitiously sent for a correspondence course on bookkeeping. She was making Sandy's life miserable because the material, which she expected would make her efficient in twenty-four hours, had not arrived.

With her arms on the back of her swivel-chair, and one knee in the seat, she twisted slowly about. The room inspired the same sense of breathless interest that she had felt the first time she entered it. Two walls were incased in glass, behind which hung a collection of riding-equipment and firearms. Some of the pieces dated back to the epoch-making journey of the pathfinders, Lewis and Clark, some to the first white settlers in the region west of the Mississippi.

There were saddles rich in silver filigree, which had come from the southwestern cattle country. There were saddles with short round skirts and open stirrups, narrow and rimmed with iron. Some had borders and

emblems stamped on the leather, some had dark stains. There were chaps, fringed and unfringed, in infinite variety. There were coiled ropes of rawhide and of well-worn grass; there were guns and knives and tomahawks; there was a stained and tattered Stars and Stripes.

"You fairly ooze atmosphere," Jerry mused aloud, her dreamy brown eyes on the saddles. "If you could speak, what couldn't you tell of romance and comedy and tragedy? Herds—bad men—*voyageurs*—rustlers—settlers—prairie-schooners—Indians—you must have seen them all!"

Her voice had dropped to a whisper. Its tenseness roused her from what was fast becoming a vermillion orgy of imagination. She swung her chair around and dropped into it with a laugh.

"Pete Gerrish says that when a person talks to himself he's sure in for adventure!" she said to herself.

She picked up a typewritten letter and regarded it with vainglorious elation. Not so bad! There was a spiral effect at the end of one sentence, but on the whole it was a creditable affair for a person who had never used a typewriter till the week before, and who was relying on the hunt-and-punch method for progress.

Her already flushed cheeks took on a deeper tinge as she looked at the filing-cases. Would she ever acquire a feeling of even bowing acquaintance with them, she wondered?

The sun lay warmly on the fields outside. A gay little breeze, spiced with pine, danced in at the open window, stirred the curls at the nape of the girl's neck, and whisked out again. Jerry looked out longingly, and shook her head.

"Remember, you're a daughter of toil now," she adjured the vagabond impulse which urged her to be up and away on her horse.

She turned her back on the tempting out-of-doors and picked up her letter.

"Gentlemen," she read aloud, "'we are shipping'—now why should I have typed that 'shipping'?—'thirty head of Guernseys on the—'"

A shadow from the open door fell on her paper. Absorbed in her corrections, she spoke without looking up from her desk.

"You are wanted at the Lower Field, Pete. The chief just phoned that more calves are missing."

As no colorful ejaculation followed her announcement—Gerrish swore with fascinating facility when he was deeply moved—she looked up in surprise. The smile which the thought of Pete had brought stiffened on her lips. She sprang to her feet and pushed back her chair.

A man leaned against the door—a giant of a man fully two inches above six feet. In a flash she sized him up.

He was of different caliber from the "boys" of the outfit. No one of them would have stood with his hat on in her presence. The stranger's Mexican sombrero, pushed far back on his head, revealed rough red hair. His eyes were a hard blue; his nose suggested the beak of a hawk. His mouth was his best feature. It looked as if it might have been tender before the insidious processes of discouragement and recklessness got in their work. One temple gave the impression of having been knocked in, and from the dent to the corner of his lips ran an angry, wrinkled scar. It gave a curiously saturnine expression to what in youth might have been a pleasing face.

From feet to waist his clothing was reminiscent of the army. From the belt up, even to the gay purple and crimson bandanna at his neck, it might have belonged to a rider.

The stranger smiled boldly as his eyes met the girl's. Jerry's heart did a hand-spring and righted. A fleeting cloud of apprehension dimmed the brilliance of her eyes.

"If you are looking for a job, you'll have to come back after five o'clock," she volunteered, with her best in-charge-of-the-office manner. "The manager is off on the range."

She could have cheerfully bitten out her tongue as she noted the smile with which the man received the information.

"I'm no cow-puncher," he answered disdainfully. "I'm not hunting a job here. I'm looking for the railroad, and I took the ranch road by mistake. Now that I'm here—"

He straightened his great shoulders, pulled his soft hat jauntily over one ear with his big, hairy hand, and took a step into the room.

"Well, you're too pretty a girl to be left alone, *sabe*? I always had a taste for stenogs!"

Jerry's heart did another turn. She hated the man's eyes. Hers flashed to the

desk. There was no use trying to telephone—he might stop her. Besides, the ranch was an affair of magnificent distances, and it would take time for any one she called to reach the office. Ming and Hopi would be of as much assistance as two Chinese dolls. She must depend upon herself to get rid of the creature.

She swiftly computed the relative splashing values of the ink-well and the pot of paste. The ink had it. Her hand crept along the desk.

"Don't come any nearer! If you're wise, you'll go at once!"

"I get you! Here's-your-hat-what's-your-hurry stuff—yes? But I think I'll stay. I've just come up from the border. You're the handsomest white girl I've seen in months. Come on, be friends! I like that gilt-edged effect in your hair and eyes. Take it from me—"

Jerry was white to the lips. She lifted the ink-well.

"You'd better go, or I—"

"What's your business here?" a crisp voice interrupted from the door.

"Steve!"

With the startled whisper the stiffening departed from Jerry's knees. She sank back in her chair.

The stranger wheeled with military precision. Then, in a voice full of astonishment and laden with pride and affection, he cried:

"*Comment ça va, mon lieutenant?*"

"Carl! Where did you come from?"

The undertone in Courtlandt's voice brought the tears stinging to Jerry's eyes. Steve gripped the stranger's hand as if he would never let it go. The two patted each other's shoulders with their free hands and beamed with suspiciously bright eyes.

"What good wind blew you here, Beechy?" Steve demanded. "Jerry, this is Carl Beechy, who was my top sergeant in France. That scar he wears was intended for me, and—and—he took it. Carl, this is my—this is Mrs. Courtlandt."

"Mrs. Courtlandt! Your wife, lieutenant? *C'est drôle, ça!* I—I thought—"

The girl had never seen such contrition as clouded Beechy's eyes when they met hers. There was not a trace of recklessness in them now; they were frankly pleading. She hesitated for a moment, then smiled.

"I'm glad that you came to the Double O, Sergeant Beechy," she said. "It was fortunate that you arrived when you did,

Steve. Mr. Beechy was just going. You—you might not have recognized him had you met him on the road!"

Her lips twitched traitorously as her glance flashed to the ink-well on the desk.

Beechy's eyes sent her a wireless message of gratitude and admiration. Then he turned to Courtlandt.

"You are the last person I expected to see here, lieutenant!"

"Weren't you looking for me, Carl? I told you—"

"I know you told me to look you up, but two years is a long time, and I've found that men forget. I went to Mexico after I left hospital. I've been drifting till now—"

He broke off the sentence sharply. His face had the curious look which tanned skin has when the blood has been drawn away from it. Jerry could have sworn that there was fright in his eyes.

Did Steve see what she saw? Evidently not, for he said:

"When you didn't turn up, I thought you'd reenlisted."

"Me? Nothing doing, lieutenant! The next time my country calls it 'll have to call so loud that I'll hear it at the other end of the world! No, me and the U. S. A. are through."

"That's fool talk, Beechy! I've heard it before. If you were needed, you and every man who talks like you would be the first to answer the call to the colors. I know you! You jumped in at the first sign of trouble, and you'd do it again. Well, there's a job for you right here."

The man's lips stiffened, and a look of dog-like devotion flooded his eyes.

"That's just like you, lieutenant, but—but I can't take it. I've signed up for— for something else, and you know there's—there's honor among thieves."

Beechy spoke with a strained attempt at levity which was belied by his eyes. He looked at Jerry.

"I never knew what a man could be till I met the lieutenant, Mrs. Courtlandt. I'd always thought that a rich guy was bound to be soft, but he's tested steel. I've got to beat it this minute. —I was telling your wife when I came in, lieutenant, that I was looking for the railroad and took the ranch road by mistake."

"But you can't go, Beechy. Good Lord, man, you've got to eat somewhere! At least stop for chow. Come along to the bunk-house. I want the boys to know

you." He turned to Jerry. "Did you get hold of Pete?"

"No, I couldn't reach him. I—I thought that it was he when Mr. Beechy appeared."

"Let it go, then." He looked at her keenly. "Have you been out of the office this week? I thought not"—as she colored faintly. "Don't do any more work to-day—*please*. Let's go, Carl."

Beechy turned to Jerry. He twisted his hand awkwardly in his big hands.

"Good-by, Mrs. Courtlandt. I hope that you'll—you'll—"

Jerry held out her hand with a smile.

"I shall always remember what you did for your lieutenant, Sergeant Beechy. Good luck! If you don't like the railroad, come back to us."

He gripped the hand she extended. Jerry gave his a warning pressure as she looked up and saw Steve regarding them intently. With a squeeze which made her see fifty-seven varieties of stars and their collateral branches, Beechy released her hand.

"Let's go, lieutenant!"

Jerry looked after the two as they strode away, broad shoulder almost touching broad shoulder. Had they been girls, they would have their arms around each other's waist, she was sure. What strange friendships the war had welded!

Braggadocio had slipped from Beechy like a garment the instant he recognized Courtlandt's voice. He had assumed an entirely different personality, like *Dr. Jekyll* changing to *Mr. Hyde*. The soldier was a much safer citizen than the man of peace, she told herself with a reminiscent shiver.

She picked up the papers on her desk, then dropped them. Steve had been emphatic about her going out, and she felt that she couldn't endure four walls a moment longer. She must be in the open.

She pulled down the top of her desk and dashed through the flowering court to the house. She called Ming Soy to bring lunch to her room, and telephoned the corral to send up Patches.

In her cool, silvery gray linen riding-clothes, Jerry drew an ecstatic breath as she gave Patches his head. He pirouetted for a moment, then settled to a steady canter. On all sides spread fields and pastures in luxuriant greenness. Beyond them mountains swept to hazy purple heights.

In one of the fields a rider turned and looked at her as she passed. She leaned forward in her saddle, opened a gate, and closed it behind her—hoping that the man had noticed with what ease the feat had been accomplished.

Great blooded shorthorns turned ruminative eyes upon her. She had seen women with that same expression when, at a society function, another entered as to whose social status they were in doubt. Off in a pen a pure-blooded Ayrshire bull pawed the ground and sent showers of earth spraying on his satiny back.

Where the trail left the flower-dotted meadow a spring bubbled from under a mushroom-shaped rock. Jerry dismounted and knelt for a drink, more for the feel of the sparkling water against her lips than because of thirst.

Where should she go, she wondered, as she mounted Patches? She had an inspiration. She would make a neighborly call on the wife of the ex-service man at Bear Creek Ranch. Jerry had never seen her, but Sandy, the carrier, who was a sort of central for news in the county, had told her that the mistress of Bear Creek was very lonely.

The water was high in the stream. The banks were pink with wild roses, and among the flowering bushes the meadow-larks kept up an invisible chorus. Jerry forced Patches to a coquettish prance across the rustic bridge. It was there that the apex of the B C triangle of land forced its way between the Double O and the X Y Z. She knew the place, for Tommy had shown her the boundary fences.

From where the rushing water narrowed and whitened over a rocky bed an old pack-trail staggered into a cup-like ravine. As if rejuvenated by the sunshine in the hollow, it straightened and sprinted straight as an arrow for the foot-hills. The sun shone warmly on lustrous fields. The air was heady with the breath of pines. A rabbit hopped from cover and scurried back again.

As Patches, with ears pricked and silky neck preened, stepped daintily along the trail, the girl sang happily:

"My road calls me, lures me
West, east, south, and north;
Most roads lead me homeward,
But my road leads men forth—
To add more miles to—"

She broke off suddenly as she rounded a clump of cottonwoods and came upon a

horseman with a small bunch of sheep. He jerked his hat low over his eyes as the girl hailed him.

"Good afternoon! I am looking for Bear Creek Ranch. Will you direct me?"

Without answering in words, the man pointed toward a cluster of buildings in a slight depression. Behind them a scantily timbered hill, in places rich with grass dotted with grazing sheep, gave the impression of an animated Corot. Before Jerry could speak the stranger had galloped off.

"A responsive party!" she soliloquized. "Was he afraid of me, I wonder? He looked as if he had a bad conscience. If he is the owner of B C Ranch, I should guess that Uncle Nick and Bruce Greyson were buncoed. That man is hiding something!"

A woman flung open the cabin door as Jerry rode up. She was young and pretty, and her clear, full eyes reminded the girl of Homer's "ox-eyed Juno." She was dressed in a bungalow apron of hectic design but scrupulous neatness. A wistful smile trembled on her lips as she asked:

"Have—have you lost your way?"

Jerry Courtlandt shook her head and slipped from the saddle. The gold in her brown eyes predominated as she fastened Patches to a post and approached the door.

"Lost? No, I came to call. I am Geraldine Courtlandt, your neighbor at the Double O."

The woman's face colored a delicate shell pink. Her expression was radiance tempered by incredulity.

"How—how nice of you, Mrs. Courtlandt! I—I am Mrs. Jim Carey—Nell Carey. Won't you come in?"

Jerry liked her dignity. She showed no consciousness of the difference between her three-room shack and the luxurious ranch-house from which her visitor had come.

"A thoroughbred!" thought the visitor, as she preceded her hostess into a small but immaculately clean room.

With a happy laugh tinged with excitement Nell Carey waved her to a seat.

"Do make yourself comfortable. If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll bring some tea. The kettle has just boiled. You won't vanish while I'm gone, will you? Promise! I have a horrible fear that your being here may be nothing but an iridescent dream."

Jerry's heart smarted with self-reproach. What heathens people can be and yet be neighbors, she thought! Here was this girl

—she was only a girl, in spite of that betraying heap of white sewing on the machine in the corner—craving companionship, and Jerry had spent hours and hours riding about the country with never a thought of being neighborly!

She looked about the room. What part of it wasn't taken up by a roll-top desk was filled by a table fairly groaning under its load of magazines. Three chairs and the machine completed the furnishings—that is, unless a worn violin-case in a corner came under that head. She hastily cleared an end of the table as Nell Carey entered with a tea-tray.

"Thank you. You are the first woman who has been inside my house since I came here a year ago," Mrs. Carey announced breathlessly. Her eyes glowed, her cheeks were flushed. "Of course, Jim has flivvered me to town, but—but I haven't met any one whom I cared to have here. Cream?"

The loneliness of it, Jerry thought, as she watched her hostess pour thick cream into the fragrant tea with hands that trembled! Then she remembered that she had been at the Double O three months, and that except for Ming Soy and Mrs. Simms, the foreman's wife at Upper Farm, she had not seen a woman. Curious that she had not missed them!

Doc Rand had been as neighborly as his busy life permitted. Bruce Greyson had been away from the X Y Z since her arrival. With Steve Courtlandt and Tommy Benson, Jerry had been absolutely content. Why? Her thoughts bolted on a tour of investigation.

She dragged them back to answer a question from her hostess.

"Not another cooky, thank you. I've been a gormand, but they are delicious!"

"Jim likes them."

"I wonder if I saw your husband by the stream?"

"No—Jim left yesterday on a hunt for help. He'll only be away four days, but it seems like years. You must have met our range-rider, Bill Small. He dropped from the sky, figuratively speaking, ten months ago. I call him the man of mystery. He never talks about himself, never mentions his people, never has letters, but he's a shark for work, and he plays beautifully. That is his." She nodded toward the violin-case in the corner. "The boys from the Double O and the X Y Z hit the trail for

the Bear Creek every chance they can get, to hear him play."

The sun topped the cap of a mountain like a mammoth red button as Jerry leaned from the saddle and held out her hand.

"You will come and see me, won't you?"

Nell Carey's lips quivered betrayingly.

"Of course, if you really want me; but it will be after—"

Jerry gave the hand she held an impulsive squeeze.

"I'll come here again before that. Aren't you madly happy? I must hurry, or they'll have the entire outfit hunting for me. Good-by!"

As she reached the pack-trail she turned and waved, and the woman standing alone by her door waved back. What an atom she seemed in the wide spaces about her!

As she rode, Jerry's mind was full of the home she had left behind. What courage Nell Carey had had to follow her man into a wilderness like that! And now a little child was coming. Jerry thought of her father, of his anger because his daughter had insisted upon accompanying the man she had married to the Double O Ranch, with all its comparative luxury. Men were curious creatures.

The sun had disappeared. Fluffy islands of clouds, pink, lemon, and violet, floated above the tops of the mountains. The sky was fast purpling, and there was a suspicion of razor-edge in the crystal-clear air as Jerry unlatched the gate by the road and closed it after her. She gave Patches his head and raced toward the ranch-house.

In the distance she saw two horsemen galloping toward her—Steve and Pete Gerrish. She glanced guiltily at her wrist-watch. She was late. Did Steve care enough to be anxious? The thought gave her a tingling sense of excitement.

As she came near the two riders, she touched Patches with her spurs, then pulled him up suddenly. He stop-slid on his haunches, a bit of circus horsemanship which Tommy had taught her. She pulled off her broad-brimmed hat with a sweep reminiscent of José at his best, and called gaily:

"*Que hay, señores? Buenos días! La señora* has been on a wild ride, yes?"

She laughed up into Steve's white face. He moistened his lips, as if they were stiff. She had made him anxious, then!

Pete Gerrish's eyes regarded her with frank admiration.

"Can she ride, chief? I want to know! Can she ride? Steve is scared, ma'am. There's a lot of strangers snooping around, and he—"

"Where have you been, Jerry?" Courtlandt had recovered his voice.

"Don't beat me, Steve!" Patches was loping along between Blue Devil and Gerrish's big sorrel. Encouraged by the foreman's quickly suppressed "Haw, haw!" at her pleasantry, she went on: "I've been to Bear Creek Ranch for tea."

"To the B C alone?" Steve inquired.

"I had an acute attack of conscience," Jerry told him. "It occurred to me that I had been something of a heathen to ignore little Mrs. Carey, though I didn't know that she was little when I went. I only knew what Sandy had told me—that there was a woman at Bear Creek hungering for some one of her own sex to talk to."

"You are to be commended more for your conscience than for your common sense," retorted Courtlandt dryly. "Don't do it again."

They reached the ranch-house steps as he spoke. He slipped to the ground, and, before Jerry could protest, he lifted her from the saddle. She felt the muscles of his arms twitch in the second he held her. Before she could speak he had gathered up the bridles of the horses and started for the corral.

The brown depths of the girl's eyes were troubled as she looked after him. What menaced the good-comradeship which their arrival at the Double O had established between herself and Steve? Now he reminded her of a wary foe thrusting and retreating on the slightest pretext. What could she have done to change him so?

She looked up at Gerrish, a puzzled question in her eyes. He shook his head as his met them.

"We mustn't mind if the chief does act a little locoed, ma'am. He's walkin' right into trouble. It's Ranlett, the skunk—saving your presence. Somebody's cayuse got rid of some hobbles when the fence was cut where the Double O and the X Y Z join, and a bunch of calves has disappeared. There ain't hide nor hair of 'em to be seen. But shucks, don't tell the chief I told you. I'll mosey 'long now."

Jerry looked after him with narrowed eyes.

"Where the Double O and the X Y Z join," Pete had said.

That was where Bear Creek Ranch came in! Like a movie close-up came a vision of the solitary horseman she had hailed—the man who had dropped from the air, who never talked about himself or his people, who never received letters—the man of mystery!

XI

COURTLANDT backed his horse suddenly into the shadow of the quaking aspens which were fluttering their gold in the sunshine. He adjusted the field-glasses that he carried slung from his saddle-fork, and looked intently at the bluff which reared from the western bank of the stream.

He was right—there were two men there. The day being Sunday, ordinarily he would have thought nothing of it; but disturbing things were happening every day now, and instinct and caution were riding close to his saddle-bow. He had the sense of living on the thin crust of a simmering volcano. He couldn't distinguish their faces, but he would be willing to swear that the two men belonged to the Double O outfit.

Above the roar of the stream, as it made its way through the cañon formed by the bluff, he heard another sound. There was no mistaking it. Steve had heard the curious whirr of a plane too often not to recognize it now. It was not uncommon to have one pass over the Double O, but for some unknown reason Courtlandt linked this one to those two skulking figures at the foot of the bluff. He heard its approach for some minutes before it came in sight above the hill which he knew was behind Bear Creek Ranch.

"That's queer! Looks as if it came out of Buzzard's Hollow," he muttered as he watched the approaching airplane.

He focused his glasses on the men again. They were waving something—something white. As if in answer to the signal, the huge mechanical bird went wing over wing, slid gracefully into a barrel-roll, and then sailed off into the distance. When Courtlandt's eyes returned from their journey with the plane, the two men had disappeared from sight.

Motionless, deep in thought, Steve sat his horse. What baneful force was at work on the ranch?

Calves had vanished as completely as if conjured into thin air. Curiously enough, they were the least valuable in the herd, and the man who had taken them couldn't

know much about cattle. Some of the boys appeared surly and disgruntled. The stand Courtlandt had taken on the alien question couldn't account for it all.

The trouble had started a few weeks after his arrival at the ranch. He had expected that Ranlett would resent having a younger man than himself in control; but he had looked for no such series of complications as had presented themselves.

The situation had one compensating side—he had been too much occupied with Double O affairs to have much time for Jerry.

He said something under his breath. Blue Devil nosed around at him inquiringly. Courtlandt looked at the sun and touched the horse lightly with his heels. It was time to meet her now. To-day they were resuming a custom that Nicholas Fairfax had inaugurated, and were having luncheon beside the stream on Sunday. Old Nick—young Nick he was then—had announced that the ceremony would stand for church, that he would worship God through nature. He and Doc Rand had provided the fish, which were cooked on forked sticks over a fire on the bank of the stream.

The work-logged physician's weekly holiday had come to be respected in Slippery Bend. Men, women, and children endured to the limit before they would disturb the doctor's fishing-trip.

Opposite the rendezvous Courtlandt drew rein and looked across the stream. Benson, on his knees on the pebbly beach, was struggling with a fire. He was in khaki riding-clothes. A small book protruded from his hip pocket. Steve smiled. To think of Tommy without a book would be like thinking of an elephant without his trunk.

Beyond the fire-maker a spring bubbled out of the bank in a clear, pure stream; above him the land sloped smoothly, greenly, up to a clump of cottonwoods. In the middle of the clearing knelt Jerry—a lovely Jerry in riding-coat and breeches, hatless, with millions of golden motes glinting in her hair where the sunlight rested. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes glowed with friendliness as she talked eagerly with the man who knelt on the other side of the cloth spread between them.

Bruce Greyson! Steve's jaws set ominously. The owner of the X Y Z was passing something to the girl, and it seemed to the prejudiced eyes of the looker-on that

their fingers touched and lingered. The two had evidently been preparing the feast, for with a satisfied nod Jerry sank back on her heels. She made a megaphone of her hands and called:

"Coo-e-e! Coo-e-e-e!"

From around a bend of the river came an answering shout. In spite of the unaccountable fury which the sight of Greyson in just that spot had roused in Courtlandt, he laughed as his eyes rested on the figure that came splashing down the middle of the stream. It was Doc Rand, attired in his usual ministerial black frock coat, with the unusual addition of hip boots of rubber. A fish-basket was slung from one shoulder, his white hair bushed beneath the brim of his Stetson, and the sun on his glasses added an uncanny touch. His broad black tie, usually worn in a Byronic bow, streamed back over his shoulders.

Rand waved and shouted as Courtlandt rode his horse down the bank and forded the stream. When Steve reached the improvised table, Greyson and Jerry sat at discreet distances from it.

"When did you get back, Bruce?" he asked, as the owner of the X Y Z sprang to his feet and gripped his extended hand.

In that instant Courtlandt saw that the whiteness of the hair about the older man's temples was more noticeable, and that it added to his fine, upright air of distinction.

"Yesterday. Brought my sister Paula, her husband, and a friend of hers along. I want you all to dine with us to-morrow night. We'll show these blown-in-the-glass New Yorkers that we are not entirely devoid of the social graces, even if we are not in the dude-ranch neighborhood! Got half-way to the Double O before I remembered that it was the old custom to lunch here on Sunday. You'll come, won't you?"

"Come?" Jerry's eyes were starry with excitement. "I'll say—oh, what beauties!" as Doc Rand puffed up the bank dangling a handsome string of trout for her inspection.

"Take 'em, Steve. You and the Benson boy can cook 'em. Isn't that an equitable division of labor, Mrs. Jerry? I caught them." Rand dropped to the ground beside her and pulled off his hat. "These—these fishing-trips aren't what they were. I miss Nick," he confided, as he mopped his hot brow.

Jerry's eyes were tender with sympathy. They wandered dreamily to the illimitable

spaces above the purple mountains as she asked softly:

"Where is he, Dr. Rand? Death is such a strange thing! I—I try to keep a brave front to Peggy, but—but I don't care to think about it."

"Why should you, at your age? All your thought should be on making your life count for something. It is different with me. I find it profoundly interesting to wonder and imagine what follows this world. For instance, look at the question in this way—at the present moment I can send my mind to Courtlandt Manor. In spirit I'm pacing the terraces with Sir Peter. I can see the boats chugging up and down the river, can smell the queer fragrance which the sun is baking out of the box hedge in the garden, can hear the birds twittering among the vines. If I can do all that now, what will it be when the spirit is not hampered by the body? It will be like flying, won't it? That reminds me—oh, Steve!"

Courtlandt poked his head above the bank beneath which he and Benson were cooking the fish. A tiny spiral of smoke rose, and with it the aroma of sizzling bacon and frying trout.

"Did you see the plane that went over?"

Rand asked.

"Yes, doc."

"I wonder where it came from! It wasn't one of the government fliers—I know their marks. Did you see the pilot do those stunts above the bluff? Curious that he should pull off that cut-up stuff there—infernally risky, I call it. He couldn't have been doing it for my benefit. What do you make of it, Steve?"

"Probably some crazy, reckless flier getting ready for a contest," Courtlandt observed, and disappeared below the bank.

Doc Rand and Greyson left directly after luncheon. Benson packed the basket, which some of the boys would take back to the ranch, before he rode off to Upper Farm on an errand for Courtlandt.

Steve helped Jerry mount, and swung into the saddle. The girl tightened her rein and held up an arresting finger.

"Listen! The 'Kreutzer Sonata,' she whispered.

From somewhere up-stream came the notes of a violin. There was a rare brightness, an aerial quality, in the music—which most artists take too gravely. The variations of the slow movements gave the sense

of a glorified voice. Jerry drew a long, tremulous breath as the last note died away.

"That must have been the man of mystery," she confided in a low voice, as if fearful, even at that distance, of disturbing the musician. "I don't care if he did drop from the sky, and if he never receives letters, he plays like an angel—if angels really can play," she added, with a laugh.

Steve Courtlandt looked up-stream, as if mystified.

"I knew a man who played that sonata in just the same way, but it can't possibly be he. Who did you say you thought it was?"

"Bill Small, the range-rider at the B C. Mrs. Carey told me about him when I called there yesterday. She said that the boys of the Double O and X Y Z outfits trailed over there every chance they could get, to hear him play. That reminds me"—her beautiful face glowed with enthusiasm—"I wonder if the boys of our outfit would care to have me play and sing for them? I should so love to do it!"

"Care? I know they would. Pete says they line up outside the court wall after dinner on the chance of hearing you sing."

"Really—*really*, Steve? I'd rather have that tribute than my name in electric lights on the Great White Way. Ask them up this afternoon. We'll have a regular musicale, with Signora Geraldina Courtlandt as head-liner. Hurry!" She touched her horse with her heels. "It's a pity that Bruce Greyson didn't wait. He—"

"Your proposition was to sing for the Double O outfit. Greyson doesn't come in on that."

"Oger! I can hear my bones scrunch between those strong white teeth of yours when you look at me like that!"

"Then remember that you're married."

"Married! But I'm so very little married," she returned, with a provocative ripple of laughter. "Do you know, Steve, somehow I never can think of you as *Benedick*, the married man? You—you are such a good-looking boy!"

She was the incarnation of girlish diablerie indulging an irresistible desire to tease. The color burned to Courtlandt's temples. He caught the bridle and drew Patches close. His eyes compelled Jerry's.

"Do you know what happens to a person who rocks a boat, Mrs. Courtlandt?" he demanded autocratically.

"Do you know what happens when a

person gets unbearably dictatorial, Mr. Courtlandt? This!"

She slapped her horse smartly on the hip. Patches threw up his head and broke from Steve's hold. The girl looked over her shoulder. Lips and eyes challenged in unison as she sang mischievously:

"My road calls me, lures me
West, east, south, and north;
Most roads lead me homeward,
But my road leads—"

Patches stepped into a gopher-hole, bringing the song to an abrupt termination.

When she met him in the late afternoon on the terrace overlooking the court, Jerry was as coolly friendly as if the little passage at arms, which had left Steve's pulses hammering, had never taken place. The piano had been moved out, and the outfit, arrayed in its Sunday best, occupied the rustic seats and benches and overflowed to the turf paths.

The girl felt choky as the men rose to greet her. They looked so big and fine, so like eager, wistful boys! She smiled at them through a mist.

"I'll sing what I think you'll like, and then you must ask for anything you want. Please smoke," she added, as she realized what it was that had made them seem so unfamiliar.

They looked from her to Steve. He nodded. With delighted grins they dropped back to their places and proceeded with the business of rolling cigarets.

Courtlandt and Benson took their places on the edge of the terrace. Overhead the sky spread like a flawless turquoise; cameoed against the blue were snow-tipped mountains. The court was gay and fragrant with blossoms. In the dark shadow of the open doorway Ming and Hopi Soy made a brilliant touch of alien color.

Jerry, in her filmy pink frock, looked not unlike a flower herself against the rosewood background of the raised piano-top, Courtlandt thought. He looked from her to the rapt, weather-browned faces of his men. His gaze came back and rested in fascinated interest on her foot, in its pink slipper, on the pedal of the instrument.

Jerry sang as she had never sung before—ballads, rollicking melodies. The men drew nearer.

When she stopped, a swarthy Italian stepped as near the piano as the terrace would permit. His black eyes seemed too

big for his thin face, his plastered hair was suggestive of infinite labor with brush and pomade.

"What is it, Tony?" Jerry asked with a smile.

"Hava you the one grand opera song?" he asked shyly.

Jerry was nonplused. She had not thought of opera for these men. As she turned over her music, she asked:

"You like opera, Tony?"

"Vera much, *signora*. At home we take the leetle seester to grand opera, even if we have not mucha to eat. We feel that eef the leetle seester hear great music, she be fine lady, not common, not bad—never!"

His earnest voice broke as he realized that he was being stared at in amazement by the outfit. He mumbled an apology and hurried back to his seat.

With a smile at Tony, Jerry placed "Tales of Hoffman" on the rack, and began the familiar "Barcarole." As the exquisite, languorous notes floated out over the court the shadows lengthened, the sun dropped behind the mountains.

There was no applause when she finished. No one was smoking; the men sat motionless. Where were their thoughts, the girl wondered? With a glance at the crimsoning foot-hills she struck a few chords and sang softly:

"Day is dying in the west;
Heaven is touching earth with rest;
Wait and worship while the night
Sets her evening lamps alight
Through all the sky!"

With the second verse the men took up the song. To most of them it brought a vivid picture of mother and home and the village church at sunset. They sang until with the last line the foot-hills took up the words and sent them peeling into space.

That closed the musicale. One by one the men came forward and thanked Jerry as she stood between Courtlandt and Benson. As the last one left the court, Tommy turned to the girl.

"I'll say that was a wonderful thing to do, Mrs. Steve!" With a quick change of tone he spoke to Courtlandt. "Marks and Schoeffler weren't here. Did you miss them?"

"Would you expect them to be here?"

"I should have expected it until to-day. Ever since Marks blew in here from nowhere, two months ago, I've been wondering where the dickens I'd seen him. When

that airplane passed over to-day, memory flipped into place the missing piece of the puzzle. He was a mechanician at the hangar where I tried to develop wings in 1917."

"You are sure of that, Tommy?"

"Sure as shooting! What's up? Why that scowl, old dear?"

"Nothing, except that your information confirms me in my suspicion that Marks and Schoeffler signaled to that airplane when it went over."

Up from the corral floated a chorus of men's voices singing:

"Wait and worship while the night
Sets her evening lamps alight
Through all the sky!"

XII

COURTLANDT'S fine brow puckered in a thoughtful crease as he waited in the living-room of the Double O for Jerry, the next evening. Benson, on the arm of a chair, bent forward to get the light from the lamp on the book he was reading. Through the open windows came the scent of pine and dewy fields, the murmur of the distant stream as it thundered and rippled its never-ending triumphal march to the sea, and the occasional soft lowing of cattle.

Jerry had been tremendously pleased and excited over Greyson's invitation to dine, Steve thought as he lighted a cigaret and blew the smoke toward Goober. The dog was regarding him with an air of watchful waiting. Was he to be invited to jump on the running-board of the automobile which stood in the drive outside the front door?

Courtlandt remembered as clearly as if it had been yesterday what Jerry had answered, the first night they met, when he had asked her if she liked the city. He could see her eyes with their golden lights, could hear her musical voice:

"I love it! It's so big, so beautiful, and so faulty! I like to be where there are many people. I should starve for companionship, not for food, in the wilderness."

And this was the girl who had been on the Double O ranch for more than three months, and not a person outside of it, except Doc Rand and some neighboring ranchmen, had she seen before she made the trip to the B C! Steve had intentionally kept out of her way. He had thought that he had his course set to avoid danger, but he had come mighty near going to pieces on an uncharted rock yesterday.

He tossed away his cigaret as Jerry's

door opened. He took an involuntary step forward, and then thrust his hands into his pockets. Lord, how impellingly beautiful she was! Her golden-hued gown, all film where it wasn't glistening paillettes, was as simple as the most expensive modiste in New York could make it. Her lovely arms were bare. Ranch life had deepened the coloring of her face and throat till her shoulders looked startlingly white in contrast.

With a surge of primitive triumph Steve noted that the only jewels she wore were a string of softly gleaming pearls and her wedding-ring. Sir Peter had given her the pearls when she was married. They had been worn by the elder Courtlandt's wife, and before that by his mother.

Steve heard Tommy give vent to a sound that was a cross between a swallow and a gasp before he struck an attitude and paraphrased theatrically:

"But soft! What light through yonder doorway breaks?
It is the east, and *Juliet* is the sun."

Jerry laughed and blew him a kiss. Her teeth rivaled in beauty the pearls below them. Ming Soy, more rice-papery than ever in the resplendent embroideries she wore in the evening, followed the girl from her room with a shimmering wrap over her arm.

"Were you casting aspersions on the brilliance of my costume, Mr. Tommy Benson? This is the first invitation I have received to dine since I left the metropolis, and I acknowledge I have splurged. Do—do you like me, Steve?"

Her attitude was demure, but her smile was adorably mischievous. At her question, Courtlandt's eyes flamed for an instant, and then smoldered.

"You'll do!" he replied, with an edge of sarcasm.

He hated himself as he saw her smile fade. Oh, why couldn't they have met—Tommy swept into the breach.

"Oh, boy! Hear the lady, Steve! 'Will I do?' Just as if she didn't know that—

"Alack, there lies more peril in thine eyes
Than twenty of their swords."

"*Gracias, señor!* If it weren't for you, Tommy, I should go down to my grave unwept, unhonored, and unsung. Now that you have fully absorbed the glory of my raiment, hold my cloak for me, that's a dear! Now this maline over my hair. I

don't wish to appear before the guests from the effete East like a *Meg Merrilies*."

"You couldn't," encouraged Benson fervently. "You'd—"

"Let's go!" cut in Courtlandt sharply, and led the way to the automobile.

He sent the leaping, barking dog back with a curt command which caused Goober to regard him in drooping, tawny-eyed reproach. He took the wheel of the roadster. He kept his eyes resolutely on the road as he drove, though he felt as if a magnet were drawing his eyes to the girl who snuggled down between him and Benson.

At the door of the X Y Z ranch-house Greyson met them.

"It's mighty good of you all to come," he said in a voice that sounded nervous and hurried.

"Good of us? Bruce, you're a public benefactor! You're a candidate for a specially designed, specially gilded halo. Do you realize what a risk you have taken introducing me to your city friends? It is so long since I have dined in state that I am quite capable of committing some horrible social blunder!"

Steve's anger flared. Why did she have to admit to Greyson that she had been bored? It was still flickering as he entered the big living-room of the ranch-house—a room lined with books from floor to ceiling, with color only in the crimson rug and heavy hangings.

"You see I've come to help you bear your exile, Steve!" greeted a laughing voice.

Jerry and Tommy, who had preceded Courtlandt, turned involuntarily. Steve met the girl's startled eyes. He reddened furiously before he turned to answer the golden-haired woman who had stepped from behind a screen.

"Felice! Where did you come from?"

His tone was a little dazed and strugglingly cordial.

"Have you lost both manners and memory, Stevie? You haven't offered to shake hands. You have apparently forgotten it, but I told you that while he was at Courtlandt Manor Mr. Greyson discovered that I had been at school with his sister. Paula has come out for the summer and brought me with her. I adore the ranch! Steve, we'll have some rides that will make those we used to have take on a pale, anemic blue!"

She linked her arm within Courtlandt's and smiled up at him beguilingly.

"H-m—vamp stuff!" Steve heard Tommy confide to Jerry.

He disengaged his arm from Mrs. Denbigh's clasp and reminded her:

"Have you seen Mrs. Courtlandt, Felice? Jerry, I'm sure you remember Mrs. Denbigh?"

"Perfectly. She is one of those persons one never forgets. Mrs. Denbigh, may I present Mr. Benson? Mr. Greyson, back up your statement—show me that Hopi saddle-blanket which you claimed yesterday had Uncle Nick's licked to a finish. That phrase is yours, not mine, remember!"

Steve's eyes followed Jerry as she moved away with her host. There was a slightly scornful tilt to her lips, while Greyson looked as if he had been caught stealing sheep—or so Courtlandt thought. Was there a sinister undercurrent at the X Y Z, as well as at Double O? If there were, he would get to the bottom of that, too.

Regardless of Benson's proximity, he burst out:

"Why did you insinuate that I had been corresponding with you, Felice?"

The woman's extremely décolleté frock was no greener than her eyes. Her elaborately coiffured yellow hair glittered, though it hadn't the satiny sheen of Jerry's. Her hands were frosty with many diamonds. Even her laugh had a metallic ring as she answered:

"What a literal person you are, Stevie! Have you been bitten with the nothing-but-the-truth mania? Can't I interest you in a saddle-blanket? It makes an excellent smoke-screen for a tête-à-tête!"

Her laugh tinkled maliciously as she nodded toward the corner where her host stood with Jerry Courtlandt. Steve deliberately turned his back.

"How was little old New York when you left, Felice?" he inquired irrelevantly.

It wasn't to be wondered at that Jerry liked people, people so evidently adored her, Courtlandt thought, as coffee was being served in the living-room after dinner. Paula Vance—who, though no older than Felice Denbigh, already showed symptoms of middle-aged curves—was officiating behind the massive silver tray with its rare antique appointments. Her husband, with liquor, lobster, and leisure writ large on his portly person from his terraced chin to his shining patent leathers, was listening to Jerry as she sat at the piano. So were Greyson and Benson.

With her eyes like stars, her cheeks flushed, Jerry was playing a low, rippling accompaniment as, in answer to a question from her host, she gave an account of her visit to Bear Creek Ranch. Felice Denbigh had her eyes on the group about the piano. She divided her attention between it and her coffee. Her light lashes swept her cheeks as she tapped her cigaret against her thumb-nail and drawled:

"Better give young Benson his time, Steve! Isn't that ranch parlance for discharging a man? He's in love with Mrs. Courtlandt!"

The man beside her reddened angrily.

"Don't bring your tainted ideas out into this clean, glorious country, Felice! Benson is—"

Steve broke off to watch Greyson's Jap, a little man with a face like the mask of tragedy, who was speaking to Jerry.

"Are you sure that he said *Mrs.* Courtlandt?" Steve heard her ask in surprise.

Then, as the man repeated his message, she excused herself to the men about her and left the room. Tommy looked after her anxiously before his eyes flashed to Steve. The latter gave an imperceptible nod, and, with a murmured excuse to Felice, followed Jerry.

As he stepped upon the porch, he saw the golden gleam of the girl's gown at the farther end. She was talking earnestly with a man—a man who was holding a saddled, impatiently pawing horse. The moon shone down upon the animal's wet sides; he had evidently been ridden hard. What did it mean?

As Steve strode toward them, he heard the girl say breathlessly:

"No! No! Don't wait! Ride as fast as you can. I'll get there some way!"

"Jerry!"

In his anxiety Steve sent his voice ahead of him. At the sound, the man leaped to the horse's back and galloped away into the dusk of the road. The girl strained her eyes after him before she turned.

"There is something queer about that man, Steve. He is a man of mystery," she confided, as if Courtlandt's materialization out of the dark was quite what she had expected.

"What did he want?"

"He wanted me. Don't look so incredulous! I may be an acquired taste, like olives, but—some people like me." She abandoned her teasing tone and hurried on:

"That man is the range-rider at Bear Creek Ranch. Mrs. Carey has been taken suddenly ill. There—there is a baby coming, you know, Steve. He wanted me to go to her. Her husband is away. They haven't had a telephone put in, and it may take hours to get the doctor and nurse from town. Indeed, he may not be able to get them at all, and so—and so he asked me to go and stay with her until he could get help."

"But you can't go, girl, at this time of night!"

"Oh, yes, I can, Steve! I'm going. Please ask Tommy to drive me. We'll make better time going in the machine, even by the round-about wagon road. If I rode, I'd have to go home first and change my clothes. He can come back for you. Hurry!"

"Back for me! Do you think you go off this ranch to-night with any one but me? It's rank folly for you to go—"

She caught the lapel of his coat and looked up at him with dewy eyes.

"Suppose—suppose that it were I, Steve!"

Even in the dim light he could see the soft color steal to her hair. He turned away with a sharp—

"Get your wrap while I go for the car, and give Benson his orders. He'll have to keep a date for me."

The star-spangled night was clear and still as Courtlandt slowed down in front of the Bear Creek ranch-house. The girl beside him shivered as she looked at the lighted windows. He laid one hand on hers.

"Steady, little girl, steady! You won't be able to help if you lose your nerve."

"I know, Steve—I'll be all right as soon as I get busy. I have never seen—"

She sprang from the car and ran up the path, her golden gown gleaming in the dim light.

As she opened the door, Courtlandt heard a sound which sent him from the car. He couldn't sit still. With lips set he paced back and forth, back and forth, while a voice inside his head, which didn't seem to be his voice at all, kept repeating:

"Suppose—suppose that it were I, Steve!"

(To be continued in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

AN OLD NEW YORKER

My grandad's age is ninety-three,
But still his memory is clear,
And oftentimes he tells to me
The tales I so delight to hear
Of bygone days like unto dreams,
Of dinner-parties and of balls.
The greatest fun was, so it seems,
When grandad paid his New Year's calls.

He started early on his round
And kept it up until quite late;
He covered thus a lot of ground,
For long one did not need to wait;
A cheery word, a friendly sign,
A tour of the reception-halls,
A bit of cake, a sip of wine—
When grandad paid his New Year's calls.

He called on Broadway here and there,
The Battery and Bowling Green,
To Wall Street, City Hall, and where,
Just off Park Place, dwelt Seraphine.
Old pictures intimate how sweet
She was in crinolines and shawls;
My grandam was a Miss Van Vliet,
When grandad paid his New Year's calls!

Harold Melbourne

One Golden Day

ENDING IN A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION ON THE QUESTION OF
LONG OR SHORT ENGAGEMENTS

By Jack Bechdolt

INTO every life comes one golden day. You may know it because its morning is more radiant with promise than any other morning that you have known, bringing a breeze that whispers of the things you long for in secret and never expect to realize. If on this day you have the courage to take what life offers, or if you have perfect faith, or if you are lucky—

Judith Lane welcomed the morning with an ecstatic sniff of the light-stirring air, which carried the mingled perfume of an old-fashioned flower-garden, the resin of pines, and the salt and iodine of sea beaches. Those first inquiring sniffs brought her bounding from bed with the perfect health and high spirits of twenty-seven. She stood at her open window, breathing deep, frowning a little in the effort to recapture the sense of what might have been a dream—what was perhaps the voice of a relenting fate telling her its secrets.

Judith Lane lived in a story-and-a-half cottage that stood in a modest yard near a road. The property and an income of a thousand dollars a year had been left her by her parents. From the window she looked down on a little garden of vegetable beds and flower borders that quaintly mingled the decorative and the delicatessen. She could see the blackish green mass of a grove of firs beyond, and, beyond that, the delicate blue of the sea melting into the tender blue of sky.

She looked out, and breathed deep, and stretched out her arms as if to seize it all. Stepping out of the silken slip she wore, she shook loose her black hair until it fell rippling about her, examined the picture of her slender, white nakedness in the mirror of her dressing-table, and declared aloud in a voice that sang:

"Something's bound to happen!"

Then Judith began to clothe herself, and it was as if every garment she added was a care resumed. When her toilet was finished, she was a normal, handsome, modern young woman of twenty-seven years. In her dark eyes was a suggestion of wistfulness over the lost secret of happiness which the day had whispered to her as she waked.

As she went down the stair she could hear the voice of Susan Rand, her handmaid, guide, philosopher, and friend, raised in vigorous song, with the clinking of breakfast dishes as accompaniment.

"Why does she always shout hymns in the morning?" Judith smilingly wondered.

Susan Rand had welcomed the day from the kitchen door. She was short, comfortably broad, and plain-featured, and owned to having passed her thirty-fifth birthday. She had been the Lanes' hired help for eighteen years, and for the last twelve years she had been waiting to marry Ernie Slocum, who worked part time in the planing-mill, part time in the village store, and part time doing odd towing jobs with his powerboat.

Just as soon as they got together six hundred dollars between them, Susan and Ernie would set the day. They had the six hundred the year Ernie proposed, but that year his father died, and he had to pay the old man's debts. They had it again five years ago, but Susan's mother had to be sent to a hospital with a lingering illness. Perhaps some fine day they would have six hundred dollars again.

Susan, looking out of the kitchen door on the smiling promise of the summer day, suddenly felt that way about it.

"I declare I feel as if 'most anything could happen to-day!" she exclaimed, and began to sing hymns lustily.

"Isn't it a lovely day?" said Susan to Judith. "Kind of makes you feel as if you'd like to do something, but you don't know just what. Seems as if anything could happen—like you could go out in the garden and dig up a pot of money, if you had a mind."

Susan was still thinking of the six hundred dollars.

"It is lovely," Judith agreed listlessly. "When I woke up I felt insanely excited and happy; but I can't remember what it all was about."

"Maybe it was about Mr. Eugene Cooper," Susan suggested slyly.

Judith frowned.

"Don't!" She meant to say "Don't remind me of him," but she changed it to "Don't be silly, Susan!"

Susan knew what her mistress meant, nevertheless. She sat down beside Judith and talked with the perfect assurance of her type of servant that the younger woman's affairs were her business.

"Look here, Judith Lane, don't tell me you're going to act the fool about Mr. Cooper again! He's coming here to-night for his answer, and if you got a lick of sense you'll marry him."

"Yes, I suppose I shall."

"Then don't say it that way—that stuck-up way. Act human, Judith Lane. Act glad. There isn't a finer young man anywhere, and he loves you. He's said so for years. He's got a load of money, and there isn't a thing against him—not one single thing!"

"Oh, God, if only there was!"

"What?"

Judith's voice was harsh.

"I said if only there was something against Gene Cooper! Anything—anything at all to spoil his perfection!"

"Judith Lane, are you crazy?"

"I don't know—maybe I am. Yes, I suppose I am. Gene Cooper wants to marry me. Gene Cooper! He's rich, upright, conscientious, kindly, proper, thrifty, affectionate, handsome, courageous, strong, intelligent, earnest, sincere, generous, sane. He's well-read, progressive, broad-minded, alert. He dances well. He sings well. He can swim like a fish. He can drive. He can beat me at golf, tennis, bridge, poker, and checkers. He's clever, writes good verses, appreciates good music and good pictures, travels, knows celebrities. He has good ancestors, old furniture, bench dogs,

landscape gardening, a good tailor, flawless servants, lovely manners. He's modest, truthful, and charitable. He forgives everything I do; and he's in love with me. He—"

Judith broke off suddenly.

"Oh, damn!" she cried, and jumped up from the table.

She stood straight and rebellious, staring out of the open French window. Susan went close to her and demanded grimly:

"Now I hope you're ashamed of yourself proper!"

"Well, I'm not—that's flat. I've had Gene Cooper flung at me for ten years. For ten years everybody and his dog has known that some day I'm going to marry him. Every last solicitous relative I own, and all of his, besides, have told me the impossible perfections of dear Eugene; and the perfectly damnable part of it is that every word is true! I'm going to marry this paragon of manhood—that's settled as sure as the stars in their courses. I couldn't escape if I went to Timbaktu or Patagonia. I'm going to marry him—and oh, Lord, how I dread it!"

"Well!" Susan cried breathlessly. "Well, of all the—well, if I was you I'd go out in the garden and find some shame for myself!"

"I'm going to," Judith murmured, and she did.

II

SHE walked rebelliously to a shaded seat near the fence, a seat backed up by blooming hydrangeas that stood as high as her head, and sat herself down to cool off. She kept thinking of the flawlessness of Eugene Cooper, and her opinions kept bubbling out in broken phrases.

"Deferential to old ladies—hair always sleek—loves nature! His finger-nails—and his linen! Human perfection, forever and ever, world without end! Well, I won't! I won't—that's flat!"

But she knew she would.

She knew that presently, in spite of all she could do, she would be ashamed of herself. She knew that the reaction from her outburst would drive her to consider Eugene Cooper kindly, to appreciate him, to loathe herself for the injustice she did him. By nightfall she would be in such a state of contrition that she might set the day for their wedding.

"I won't!" she exploded again.

She got no farther. From the clump of hydrangeas she saw protruding the toe of a man's shoe.

At this shocking discovery she sprang from the garden seat.

Instantly a man's voice spoke.

"Don't go, please! If you don't mind, will you be good enough to sit down just as you were?"

She peered hastily through the hydrangea leaves. The man was huddled behind the bushes, close against the high board fence—a slender, hatless, youngish man, with bright red hair, a snub nose, and a restless blue eye.

"Don't look at me!" he exclaimed hurriedly, but keeping his voice well modulated. "Pretend you never saw me—and sit down again. Won't you *please* sit down again?"

Judith found herself sitting on the bench again. As she did so, she heard the ringing of the cottage door-bell.

The red-haired man kept on talking from his shelter.

"This is very important," he said rapidly. "I ask you to do as I say. I'll explain later. It's all harmless and honest and very simple, but it would take too long to tell it now. When some men come in here looking for me, pretend you never saw me. You might add that you saw somebody run across the road in the opposite direction. Will you do this for me?"

"Why should I?" Judith at last found breath to demand.

"No reason—just because I ask it. Of course, you don't know who I am."

"I certainly do not."

Judith stopped short. What the man had predicted was happening. Susan was ushering three men into the garden by way of the French window.

"Remember!" the red-haired man was prompting. "You saw me run across the road. Perfectly all right—explain everything—no harm in taking a chance, is there?"

"Judith!" Susan was calling. "The gentlemen say there's a man in the garden. He ran in here. He's a murderer, and—"

One of the three interrupted her.

"No, not a murderer—an escaped prisoner," Susan corrected.

"Really?" Judith's exclamation was polite but challenging. "I haven't seen him."

"Bully! Oh, bully!" came a murmur of applause from behind.

"We thought we saw him run this way, miss," one of the visitors said. "A red-haired, youngish man—blue eyes. My name's Haynes, miss—deputy sheriff. We're all from the sheriff's office."

"Is he a desperate criminal?" Judith asked with proper interest.

"Dunno. We want him for breaking arrest. He was driving a motor-car and hit a milk-truck. We arrested him, and he got away while we were taking him to the justice's."

"I'm sure you're welcome to look around, but there has been nobody here. I did see a man in the road."

"Yes?"

"He might have had red hair—I don't know. He was running fast. He went toward the creek on the other side."

"That's our bird, Haynes!" one of the three exclaimed.

"Nothing here—anybody can see that," said a second.

"Off with you!" Haynes cried eagerly. "Remember, boys, we got to nail our man!"

The three of them started on their new chase.

"That's fine!" murmured the voice behind Judith. "Worked like a charm; but don't ditch me yet. Can you get rid of that hired girl?"

"Susan!" Judith called promptly. "Will you walk in for the mail now? I'm expecting a letter by the first delivery."

"And leave you alone here, with criminals running around the country wild?"

"Don't be silly! I'll take care of any criminals I find. Run along!"

Susan looked at Judith with curiosity evident. Her mistress's cheeks were unusually pink and her eyes unusually bright.

"H-m!" she muttered suspiciously.

"A letter from Eugene," Judith added.

"All right!"

When Susan was gone, Judith rose.

"Now suppose you come out of that and give an explanation of yourself," she suggested briskly.

"If you don't mind, I'll stay here. Somebody might see me in your garden; but I'll explain."

The red-haired man emerged partially from the hydrangeas and grinned up at Judith.

"You're great—simply great!" he said appreciatively. "The way you turned them off was—"

"They're not far off, remember. If your explanation doesn't fit—"

"It will. It's bound to fit. Please pretend to be interested in something—the flowers, for instance—while I talk, will you? That's better! Well, my name's Smith—Cliff Smith. Home address, Manhattan. I was driving a car, as the deputy said, and I hit a milk-truck. I was speeding a little, because I'm on the way to my wedding. Girl's waiting for me at her home in Pohasset. Got to be there at two, or she'll be waiting at the altar, and then—well, you can see how it is. I saw that I was in for hours of delay if I went to court, so I jumped out of the car and ran for it. Not so very criminal, is it?"

Judith withheld judgment. It did not sound criminal, if the young man was telling the truth.

"Then the deputies chased me, and I hid in your garden. Now if I can get to the town below here that's on the railroad—Palmer—I can catch a train that goes through at noon, and make Pohasset all right; but somebody's got to help me. Will you?"

"I don't know—" Judith hesitated.

The red-haired man grew very earnest.

"Surely you won't ditch me now. Think what this means to me! My wedding-day! Think what it means to—to Clara!"

"Is that her name?"

"Yes—Clara Church. If you could just see her once! For her sake you'll help me, won't you? Suppose you were in her place, waiting at the church! You wouldn't like being kept waiting, would you?"

Judith supposed she would not. He was a very eloquent pleader—so eloquent that she wondered; with a remnant of caution, if he was telling the truth. After all, did it matter much if he was? Judith Lane had been living in that cottage for years, waiting for romance to come along. She had despaired of its coming. Well, here it was—somebody else's romance, to be sure, but even half a loaf—

"How could I help you?" she asked.

"You have a car in that garage, haven't you?"

"Ye-es."

"Drive me over to Palmer before these deputies catch me. That's all I ask. Isn't that reasonable?"

It sounded reasonable; and there was something very likable about the red-haired young man—his blue eyes, especially.

"I'll get the car out. Wait here until I call you; then we'll make a run for it."

III

COMMITTED to the adventure, Judith went about it in high spirits. When her cheap little runabout was in the drive, she called the fugitive with a low whistle. He came from his hiding-place.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Judith, as he was about to get into the car. "There's Susan coming. Here—into the kitchen!"

She hustled him through the door, followed, and went to the front of the house, closing the kitchen door on the red-haired man.

"Remember," he whispered as the door closed on him, "it's for Cora's sake!"

Cora! A moment ago it was Clara who was waiting at the altar. Judith made a mental note of the discrepancy.

Susan bustled in by the front door.

"Met Tom Prentiss," she explained. "Mail's two hours late this morning. Saved me a long walk. Who shut that kitchen door?"

"Susan! Wait a minute!"

Susan was making a bee-line for the door, deaf to Judith's cry.

"Shutting off the draft that way!" she grumbled. "Why, the house 'll be as hot as Tophet!"

She swung open the door with a bang. Judith was on her heels, feeling a little faint; but she saw that the kitchen was empty of strangers.

"What you doing with the car out?" Susan demanded.

"Going to clean the spark-plugs. Run up-stairs and find me a big apron, will you?"

Susan went, grumbling under her breath. The kitchen door moved, and the red-haired man emerged from the corner where he had been hiding.

"Come on!" Judith whispered, but she had little need to urge him.

The little roadster had one of its gentle fits, and started without balking. They plunged out of the drive into the road. Judith was conscious that Susan's head was out of an upper window and that she was screaming after them.

A man's shout answered Susan's scream. From the tail of her eye Judith saw the man—it looked like Haynes—emerging from the shrubbery and standing in the road, staring after them.

She did not have time to watch Haynes. She needed all her attention for the road. The little car was making more speed than its maker ever dreamed it could. The cottage was far behind them. They had the road toward Palmer to themselves.

After half an hour of demon driving, Judith felt tolerably safe. Talk being possible between them, her passenger burst out:

"You are a wonder, no mistake! You drive like Barney Oldfield. And cool-headed—I'll say so! I want you to understand I'm more than grateful for what you've done. I'll never forget you—never, as long as I live. I—"

"Oh, I'm doing all this for—what did you say your bride's name was?"

"Clara—Clara Church."

"They still live in Pohasset?"

"Why, yes—they've always lived there so far as I know; though it was while she was visiting in New York that I became engaged to Cora."

"I thought her name was Clara!"

"So it is." His blue eyes were candid.

"But you call her Cora now!"

"Oh, Cora's her sister. It's Clara I'm going to marry. Hey, what—"

The car stopped with a jerk.

"Look here!" Judith said severely. "I don't believe you're going to marry either one of them. You can't remember that name for a minute at a time!"

"But don't stop, please! We must—"

"We must not. We don't stir from here until you tell the truth about yourself. And the deputies are coming—I saw them. Now just what are you running away from?"

"I'll tell you; but drive on."

"You did lie to me, then?"

"Yes, but don't stop here. For Heaven's sake, drive on! I can tell you as we go. Start the car!"

"Not until I know the truth."

Judith's lips were set severely. The red-haired passenger began to plead with a desperate intentness.

"Whatever I told you I couldn't prove, could I? You'd have to take it on faith. I ask you to take me on faith. I give you my word I've done nothing to be ashamed of. Can't you believe that?"

Judith could believe it, he was so thoroughly in earnest.

"But I want to know," she insisted.

"Start the car, and I'll tell you."

Was there something hypnotic about the

red-haired man's blue eyes that made her obey? Whatever it was, she started the roadster and moved forward slowly.

The fugitive sighed with relief.

"Just a little faster," he urged. "Now for the story. I have a chum—his name is Bob Allen. We were kids together, went to the same schools, smoke each other's pipes, wear each other's dress clothes. Please put on a little more gas! Bob's just my age, but dark-haired, and handsome. Don't slow down for those bumps—I don't mind. Bob went into business. He's a tire manufacturer—Allen tires, you've probably heard of them. Advance your spark a bit—she'll run smoother. His father left him money. He was doing well, but he has enemies—powerful business rivals. Jove, I love to see you handle a car! There was a murder. Bob was accused. He didn't do it. I know, because we were fishing that day on Skowhegan Lake. Can you hear me all right? I'll bet we could do forty, or more, if you let her out! I'm Bob's one alibi. Without me they'll railroad him. Is that a car behind us? One night last week a gang with masks got me—just off Fifth Avenue, too. Heavens, there's somebody chasing us!"

Judith swerved her glance from the road, instinctively slowing the car a little. She caught sight of a car behind them. Then the wheel was snatched from her hands. The roadster swerved from the smooth highway into a crude dirt trail—an abandoned wood road. Branches lashed savagely about their heads, and they crouched low. They were tossed from bump to bump, and then stopped with sickening abruptness.

Judith was half lifted, half pushed, from the car and drawn into the shelter of a thicket by the red-haired man. They heard the pursuing car slow down with a shriek of brakes. Voices rose in argument.

"He went on."

"He did not!"

"Sure he did, Haynes!"

"Well, the last I saw of 'em they were in the middle of the road, rounding the curve; and I don't see any signs here—"

Then came the roar of the pursuing car's engine, gears clashing, and a diminuendo of pursuit that had passed them by.

"Safe!" said the red-haired man.

He went to look at the roadster, and groaned aloud. It was buried hub deep in mud, with one wheel broken.

"We are stuck," he said. "You must let me pay for that damage."

He tendered a bill, and Judith accepted it calmly.

"This gives you time to finish your story about Bob Allen," she suggested.

"Allen?" He stared inquiringly. Then, with the return of memory, he went on: "Oh, yes! Bob Allen is—"

"Another lie!"

He met her bitter, accusing look with a childlike grin.

"Wasn't it a peach of a lie, though? Regular mile-a-minute lying! Here, where are you going?"

Judith was going home. Probably she would have to walk the weary distance, but she was in a state of mind to do it. She was trembling with rage and indignation, and she walked straight and fast.

"Wait!" shouted the red-haired man.

She heard him start to run, then a crash. He had tripped over a broken branch and was down. She looked over her shoulder and saw him start to rise, but he did not rise. He sat down suddenly, with a white face and a queer expression on it. He seized his ankle in both hands and groaned. In spite of her indignation, she turned back.

"I did it this time," he said calmly enough, but his lips were twitching. "Turned my foot clear around. It's about as useful now as a knot-hole in a wooden leg."

"Oh! And it hurts you?"

"It does."

Judith sank down by him.

"Oh, if there was only something that I could do!"

"Maybe—a little water—"

His eyes closed, and he went limp.

She hunted frantically: about the boggy ground, found a little pool, made a cup of a lily leaf, and brought water, which she spilled on his face and forced between his lips.

Smith—if that was his name—opened his blue eyes, producing a startling effect so close to her own. He grinned crookedly.

"Much better, thanks; but I can't run very far on this."

"What will you do?"

"Don't know. I've got to think. One thing I've got to do—I've got to get to Washington."

"Washington! You said—oh, will you tell the truth?" Judith's eyes had a glint that suggested a desire to shake him sound-

ly. "How do you expect me, or anybody, to help you when you lie and lie and lie?"

Smith straightened up. He was white with pain and in terrible earnest.

"I did lie," he said; "but when I tell you I'm going to Washington, it's the truth. I must be there early to-morrow morning. I could tell you why, but I won't."

"You won't?"

"No—you wouldn't believe me. The real truth is more fantastic than any of the lies I told you; and if I proved to you that it was true I should have to violate a trust and betray my sworn allegiance. Judith—that's your name, isn't it, as truly as mine's Smith?—Judith, you've got to believe in me without proof!"

"Oh, have I?" Judith rose haughtily. "I wasn't aware that I had to do anything of the sort."

She began to walk away. Smith said nothing, but sat still, watching her. His helplessness was more appealing than anything he could have said, and yet she steeled her heart.

Finally she reached the point where the wood trail entered the road. Turning, she peered surreptitiously through the branches. Smith looked small and helpless. Was it humane to leave the man alone and crippled in such a place?

She went back hurriedly.

"Lean on me, and I'll get you to the road. Somebody will pass sooner or later and help you out."

They managed it rather awkwardly, for his weight was heavy on her slender shoulder. When they had reached the highway, and she was turning away again, the red-haired man cried out:

"Wait! I'll tell you the reason. I warn you I can't prove the truth of what I say—not to-day; but I'll tell you—"

"No!" Judith interrupted vehemently. "Don't tell me! I won't listen. If you begin, I shall leave you at once."

"But you'll believe in me? You'll believe I'm honest? You'll not think you've been helping a common criminal?"

"I'll take you at your word."

"That's marvelous! I—I am grateful. I don't understand why I'm so lucky!"

Judith didn't understand clearly, either; but something about this man Smith had won her sympathy—nay, more, her liking. She was afraid now lest he should offer one more explanation that would prove untrue. She wanted to believe in Smith.

"Then everything's all right," he concluded. "That is, all but one thing. Even if we had a car, we couldn't make Palmer in time to catch that once-a-day train out of there. What we're going to do I don't know, but I must reach Washington by morning."

Judith momentarily forgot their situation in a sense of relief. This time he had not contradicted himself. He did want to reach Washington! By that much, at least, her new faith was justified.

IV

TRULY it was an extraordinary state of affairs. For no reason at all Judith liked this red-haired man who called himself Smith, and the more she talked with him the better she liked him.

Every sentence he began brought a sharp little pain to her—her fear that once again he would say something which would shatter her belief in him, which would prove that he had lied again. But as sentence followed sentence, as theme followed theme—for they sat by the road almost three hours without seeing one passing vehicle or pedestrian—her gratitude to him grew. He had not yet lied. He still wanted to get to Washington before morning.

"It's long past noon," he said with a deeply worried look. "I'm getting into the devil of a fix! This chap Haynes and his gang are likely to come back this way sooner or later. If they get me, good night! Now look here, Judith Lane, there never was a fix that there wasn't a way out of. What had we better do?"

"You're really in earnest, Smith? You do want to get to—Washington?"

"In earnest?" Smith exclaimed bitterly. "Do I look like a man who'd spend a hot day running, smashing other people's automobiles, and spraining my ankle, for fun? If I seem to laugh at all this, it's because excitement affects me that way. I'm not laughing really. I tell you, deep down inside me I'm aware all the time that I'm on a life-or-death errand, and if I don't succeed it means—well, it means everything; not only my own future, but perhaps the future of many others. I'm not asking your help out of idle curiosity—please believe that!"

Judith bowed her head soberly.

"You've been very fine to me," Smith burst out. "I don't believe there's another woman in the world who would do as much

as you have for me. I'm never going to forget you, Judith Lane—never! I wouldn't ask anything more for myself. It's not on my account I asked your help."

"If only somebody would pass in a car!" Judith began, deeply moved by his earnestness. Then her face brightened. "Somebody is coming at last! Listen! A steamer passes off shore every day—a steamer to Baltimore; and I know where there is a motor-boat. If we can get a lift—"

She jumped up and ran into the middle of the road, her arms spread to signal the approaching car. It was traveling fast, and Judith was nearly run down before she was seen and its driver burned his tires in an abrupt stop.

The car was a low-slung roadster—a powerful brute of a car, with nickel trim and gleaming maroon paint. A handsome young fellow in a tweed cap stared at Judith, and they both exclaimed at once.

"Judith!"

"Eugene!" Judith turned radiantly on Smith. "It's all right now, Smith! Mr. Cooper's a friend of mine."

"What in the world's the matter?" Eugene Cooper exclaimed. "Susan told me you had gone tearing off with a man, and—"

He became aware of Smith, and stopped.

"Mr. Smith, Mr. Cooper," Judith introduced them with a smile.

"Sorry I can't get up," Smith grinned. "Got a flat wheel. My ankle's twisted."

Eugene Cooper was staring hard at Smith.

"Look here!" he cried bluntly. "You answer the description of the chap those deputies were chasing!"

"I'm the man."

"Yes, he's the man," Judith chimed in; "but it's all right—perfectly all right."

"Oh, is it?" Cooper muttered thickly.

"Of course it is, Eugene. Don't be a silly! But Mr. Smith has to get away. He has to get to Washington by to-morrow morning, and those men are trying to stop him."

"Well, rather!" Eugene Cooper fancied a dry wit. "Probably you don't know who Mr. Smith is, Judith, but I do."

"Well, who am I?" Smith asked.

"I heard all about this man from the deputies at Palmer; and not only from the deputies"—Cooper became more impressive—"but from Amos Windegren himself. Mr. Windegren is president of the Palmer

Bank, Smith. He keeps in touch with New York."

"Does he?" Smith asked amiably.

"Yes, he does; and if you won't confess it, I'll have to tell it. Judith, this man, whom you appear to have been befriending in some mistaken notion of hospitality, is wanted by the New York police in connection with a bond robbery. He was being followed by the deputies when the car he was driving hit a milk-truck near your place. Haynes told me they're expecting a warrant for him any moment, and Windergren verified that by telephone. A bond thief!"

"I don't believe it!" Judith cried flatly.

Smith said nothing, but he gave her a look of dog-like gratitude.

"I don't believe a word of it," Judith repeated. "He says he has important business in Washington to-morrow morning, and a lot depends on his getting there. Now, Eugene, all we want of you is a lift as far as Ernie Slocum's place."

"Well, you won't get it."

Eugene folded his arms and looked grim.

"But, Cooper, that's the truth!" cried Smith, trying to rise.

Judith ran to his side and supported him as he hobbled up to the car—a sight that made Eugene Cooper slightly bluish about the jaws.

"Now, Cooper, listen to me—you, too, Judith. I'm going to tell you who I am and what my business is, and trust to your promise of secrecy."

"Don't trouble your imagination on my account," Cooper warned him grimly.

Smith's answer was a steady, disdainful look.

"I can't prove the truth of my story. If I did, I should betray a trust."

"That's a good one!" Eugene interrupted derisively.

Ignoring the interruption, Smith went on.

"As it is, I'm going further than I should, but it's too late now to affect the matter very much. My name is Smith—Cliff Smith. I'm an agent for the Department of the Interior. I'm an expert on—well, say on nitrates, so long as that isn't it. Six weeks ago my chief sent me to Mexico to bring back a confidential report on some newly discovered deposits, a new field of tremendous potential importance. My visit, my investigations, and my report are state secrets. The information is wanted by our government because of its military

value; but it is absolutely vital that at this time, when the United States is promoting a world conference for disarmament, we should make no move that could be construed as secret preparation for future wars. You can surely understand how embarrassing it would be to our diplomats if news of my work became public, and how easily it could be misconstrued. You can see that, can't you?"

"I can," Judith said loyally.

Eugene Cooper said nothing.

"I returned from Mexico by way of New York. Reached the city forty-eight hours ago," Smith continued. "The deposits concerning which I am a specialist—call them nitrates—happen to be a very important factor in several industries. Industrial stocks are greatly affected by news of a new field, or new reports on an old one. It happens that just now a little ring of Wall Street brokers is very busy manipulating these particular industrials."

"Oh, come!" said Eugene loftily.

"This is getting too good!"

"Shut up," Smith answered. "Shut up—and listen. Do you think I'm doing this to amuse you? When I reached New York, agents of the Wall Street clique made the mistake of trying to buy my information. When they found they couldn't buy it, they tried, by means of private detectives, to get me into a fix that would delay me in rendering it. If you understand how I'm situated, you can see that I can't go to a police-station and demand protection. I'm not even supposed to be away from my desk in Washington. Whatever happens to me, I've got to fight it out for myself. I thought I'd given these men—Haynes and his crew—the slip by using a motor-car instead of going by train. They followed me. They maneuvered that milk-truck into my way. They'll stop only short of murder to get me sewed up for just as long as possible. That's what they're paid to do; and I'm paid, and I've given my word, to get that report to my chief just as fast as I can. That's my story, and it's the truth!"

"Judith, this is the most fantastic lie I ever heard!" Cooper cried.

"Judith," Smith said meaningly, "I told you that the truth was harder to believe than my lies. Do you—"

"I believe every word of what he says," Judith answered proudly. "Eugene, let us into the car!"

"Never!" shouted Cooper. "Judith, you get in here beside me and come home!"
 "Not without Mr. Smith," returned Judith.

"Yes, without Mr. Smith. Get in—I command it!" Cooper saw that that was a mistake. "I request it," he amended hastily. "Judith, I beg you, be reasonable! This man's nothing but a common liar."

"Hold on!" Smith restrained himself by an effort.

"A common liar with a good imagination," Eugene insisted, with a certain excellent courage. "Get in beside me!"

"Not without Smith."

"Then I'll stay here until you do."

Cooper meant it.

Smith looked anxiously down the road and up the road.

"Oh, dear!" Judith sighed, becoming despondent. "What a muddle! We'll never find a way out, I guess."

She walked a few paces, sniffed loudly, and bent down to peer under the car.

"Eugene!" she cried. "Your gas-tank's leaking frightfully. Look!"

Cooper swung himself out of the car and hurried to the back of it, where Judith was peering and exclaiming. Judith edged around to Smith.

"Quick!" she whispered.

Lifting and pushing, she got him into the roadster. She vaulted nimbly to the driver's seat, and the car started with a leap that left Eugene Cooper, who had crawled under the rear end, lying on his back facing the sky and looking very foolish.

"I managed to spill out a little gas by opening the pet-cock that drains the tank!" Judith shouted in Smith's ear.

Then she glanced back. Cooper had righted himself, and stood in the middle of the road. He seemed to be dancing, and he looked beside himself with rage.

"Bless his heart, he's lost his temper at last!" Judith sighed. "I think more of the perfect man right now than I ever did in my life!"

V

ERNIE SLOCUM's motor-boat Susan, borrowed without Ernie's knowledge, lifted on the gentle swells of a summer sea in the golden light of late afternoon. Judith Lane stood poised at the bows, waving a coat back and forth to attract the attention of the oncoming steamer bound for Baltimore.

Smith watched her with something more

than appreciation for the fine figure she made. There was something rapt in his gaze, and he swallowed frequently, trying to relieve the tightness in his throat.

He was thinking that just to look at Judith was like hearing majestic music that stirred one to tears and shouting.

Obedient to the girl's signal, the passenger steamer stopped and lay waiting for them. The motor-boat rubbed its nose along the iron flank of the bigger vessel. Judith shouted for a ladder and somebody to help an injured man aboard.

As the ladder came coiling downward, they exchanged a long look.

"You'll be able to catch plenty of trains from Baltimore," Judith said with a little catch of breath. "I hope—"

"Yes, I'll be able to make it all right. And, Judith, that last explanation I gave to Cooper—"

"Yes?"

There was an awful, cold feeling about Judith's heart. She was faint, unexpectedly. Oh, surely, not another lie! He would justify her faith in him at last!

"Well, Judith, did you believe that story?"

"I—I said I did. I—I hoped that—"

"But did you believe me?"

She avoided his eyes. She looked away toward the land.

"Yes," she said miserably.

"Judith, that story was the truth, every word of it. God bless you!"

Before she had any warning, Smith had caught her in his arms and kissed her on the lips.

The sailor descending to help him hung between ship and sea, almost petrified with astonishment.

"The truth!" Smith repeated, and kissed her again. "You know what this means?" He kissed her a third time. "It means that I love you, Judith; and I'm coming back to make you love me—soon. Will you wait—will you, Judith?"

"Yes!" Judith cried recklessly, returning his embrace, defiant of a straggling cheer and grinning faces that peered over the rail above.

VI

WHEN Judith got home, Susan Rand was boiling with news so exciting that she forgot to ask even where Judith had been.

"I knew something would happen to-day—something grand!" Susan beamed. "Ju-

dith, guess! Ernie Slocum's boat was stolen, but whoever took it left six hundred dollars in bank-notes under Ernie's kitchen door. Ernie's just left here; and we're going to be married right away. Judith, it's the loveliest day of my life!"

Judith, wrapped in her own happiness, returned Susan's news with a hug and kiss, but she thought to herself pityingly:

"The poor thing! Engaged twelve years! She's missed all the romance of life!"

Then she told Susan her own story in all its glory. When she had done, Susan kissed her, but she said aloud:

"Judith, you poor child, how perfectly terrible! Engaged to marry a man you've only known a few hours! No courtship! No romance! Oh, my poor Judith!"

But, after all, what is romance except that one golden day when, because of our courage to take what life offers, or our faith, or our luck, events fall out exactly as we would have them?

Finding Out About Bud

HOW THE BRADLEY DUCK-FARM ON PUGET SOUND GOT ITS START

By Herman Howard Matteson

FOR Kai Sei Elvers this had been a day to be marked with a black square and two red flags—squally, with a hurricane coming.

Kai Sei, who had been so nicknamed by the Puget Sound Indians because she always wore an apron, had begun the day by encouraging four ducks to commit suicide. In the midst of the task of cutting grass for the ducks—of which herbage one small duck will devour an unconscionable quantity—her father, whose deck voice had not been mitigated by the rheumatism that otherwise had almost completely crippled him, boomed forth at her from the cabin to "lay aft to the galley" and heat his red flannel.

Laying aft lively, Kai Sei had neglected to close one of the duck-pens. Promptly four ducks had waddled forth to the beach, where they devoured no telling how many wagglers. Wagglers—little, squirmy sand-worms with about a thousand legs, or flippers—are not a good diet for ducks.

Suddenly remembering that she had left a pen open, Kai Sei, in her guilty perturbation, dropped the bottle of oil of winter-green with which she was saturating the hot flannel. The oil cost two dollars for a small bottle. In the cracked teacup on the shelf she had one good silver dollar and a

plugged four-bit piece. Captain Zeno Elvers's ten-dollar check from the Seamen's Aid wouldn't be coming in for two whole weeks yet.

Kai Sei dashed into the dooryard only to behold four ducks with their splay yellow feet upturned to the sun, quite dead, from having looked upon the waggler when it waggled. She hurled the four defunct bodies into the bay. She had just got the gate of the duck-pen closed when here came Mrs. Bart Widgin.

Mrs. Widgin's husband tended the blinker lights in the vicinity of Sucia Island. Mr. Widgin went every day to the post-office on Waldron Island, five miles distant, to get the mail for the half-dozen families on Sucia.

Mrs. Widgin had come to comfort Kai—or so she assented.

"La, Kai!" she said. "I, for one, don't believe a word of it. Even if he has got a lot of money, I don't believe he got it crooked. Of course, a party just can't keep from wondering where Bud Bradley would ever get hold of a thousand dollars. That's human; but I don't believe a word—not a word!"

"Who's got a thousand dollars?"

"You mean to tell me, Kai Sei Elvers, you're articted to marry him, and you don't

know who? Why, Bud Bradley has got a thousand, just like I said. My man seen the bundle when Bud pulled it to Waldron post-office to send and get hisself a slicker with six dollars of it."

"Oh, yes, Bud! Sure! I'd kind of forgot about it."

Kai Sei's smile was sickly, unconvincing. Mrs. Widgin gave the girl a truculent glare.

"Anyway, Kai, I felt it my Christian duty to come and tell you the talk that's going—my Christian duty. There is them that says Bud don't never catch no smugglers because it pays better not to catch 'em. I, for one, don't believe a word of it; but I thought you, artiled to him, should ought to know the talk, and kind of trim and reef yourself according. I hope I know my duty when I see it!"

Mrs. Widgin swept the clean but shabby little kitchen with an appraising eye, and marched forth.

"Oh, Mrs. Widgin!" Kai called after the woman. "When was it that your man saw the money? Just this morning! Oh, yes! You see I knew Bud was going to get it," Kai lied, "but I didn't know it had come."

Bud Bradley with a thousand dollars that he hadn't told Kai about—Kai, his artiled wife! Yes, for four years Kai had been his artiled wife. Artiled for four years, but not married, for the simple reason that Bud Bradley, as a catcher of smugglers, a preventer of the unlawful entry into the United States of Chinese, Japanese, and Hindus, had been a miserable failure. He was too honest, too stupid, too crooked, too something. Never in four years had Bud caught a single smuggler. He was still in the third class of the service, drawing sixty dollars a month.

Not only had Bud been kept in the third class, but he had been warned time and again, from headquarters, that there was no end of narcotic smuggling going on through the Puget Sound islands. More than once it had been hinted that unless he began to produce results, the department would have to ask for his resignation.

But for one single feat that was to his credit, Bud would have been discharged long before. During early war days six armed draft fugitives had taken sanctuary on Matia Island, awaiting a chance to get into British Columbia. Alone, Bud had gone to Matia, and had brought in the six slackers, four of them still alive.

But Bud couldn't go on forever on the strength of that single feat. Kai's womanly intuition told her that he would never, never make good as a taker of criminals. She told him so. She urged him to resign and try duck-farming with her.

Not until he had caught a smuggler, he answered stubbornly. He aimed to catch a smuggler or start a seam!

It was simply out of the question to marry on sixty dollars a month. They would have to build a new cabin—near her father's, so that she could still lay aft to the galley upon command; but another cabin they would have to have. Her father had repeatedly declared that he proposed to sail his own, even if he did have to do his charting from a bunk, to the day when at last they half-masted his colors from the mizzen top.

On sixty dollars a month they could build no cabin.

Latterly, Kai had heard whisperings to the effect that Bud was either a fool or a crook. Bud was simple, credulous, honest as the day, Kai thought, but not a fool—nor a crook, either. This story about the thousand dollars had given her a shock like a blow.

Then, when she called after Mrs. Widgin and learned that the thousand-dollar transaction had occurred only an hour before, on Waldron Island, whence Bud had not yet returned, her heart had begun to sing like a bird. Of course, the very instant that Bud landed, he would come running to share the good news with her, and would tell her where he got the money. Bud had a thousand dollars! The new cabin! Where in the world—

No, she wouldn't even try to guess. Bud would tell her. A whole thousand dollars, less only six dollars, the price of a slicker! How in the world of mortals had Bud ever got hold of a—

No! No! Bud would run straight and tell her the very first thing.

Kai ran to the rock pinnacle behind the cabin. There was Bud. He was just rowing in from the direction of Waldron Island. He had landed on Sucia. He was drawing up the dory above tide-mark. He had started up the slope to the trail. He was coming!

Oh, well, what if he had turned into his own cabin? Presently he would be coming.

Half an hour—an hour—Bud still within his own cabin. Mighty selfish! Had she

got hold of a thousand dollars she would have winged out with the glad tidings like a gull homing to its nest.

Two hours—Bud still in his cabin.

Dejectedly Kai Sei Elvers walked down from the rock pinnacle and entered the galley kitchen.

Well, this was enough. It was high time she was finding out about Bud Bradley!

II

IN his own cabin, nearly a quarter of a mile distant from the cabin of Captain Zeno Elvers, Bud Bradley was having a tough time of it. A wad of bills lay upon the table before him, also a letter. He looked at the money with a lack-luster eye. No longer was he able to get any thrill out of the sight. His gaze rested gloomily upon the letter.

Quite unaware that repeated nervous chewings upon an indelible pencil had painted up his lips and cheeks as for war, Bud humped himself over the table and began to write.

"It's all so, sure enough," Bud's pen sputtered. "I hain't ketched a smuggler in four years. Any man that says I ever took money for not ketching one I can lick very gladly. As for me being fired, you are quite wrong. I hain't fired. I am sending back this month's pay-check. Keep it. Keep next month's, too. When I get ready to resign, I'll let you know. From yours truly, Bud Bradley."

Bud smudged out a trifling error here and there with his thumb, folded the letter, and put it into an envelope. He placed the envelope in one pocket, the wad of bills in another.

Several times he started from this chair, only to sink back again. Thrumming the table edge, he stared up at the ceiling.

Had he killed a man, robbed a widow, kicked over a child in the trail, he believed he could have gone to Kai Sei Elvers and confessed; but to be fired, discharged, charged with having accepted bribe money—that he could not confess. He simply could not!

About the only thing Bud could think of as an excuse for remaining away from Kai Sei would be to get tremendously busy in the line of duty. The line of duty—that was the ticket!

This resolve forming within his consciousness, Bud began to run over in his mind the list of those suspected of being

engaged in smuggling or China-running enterprises.

Wick Cotter! Wick Cotter!

Kai Sei herself had given Bud a hint that Wick Cotter mightn't be the innocent summer camper that he pretended to be, but a smuggler. At the time Bud had laughed down the suggestion, and had said he guessed Cotter was only summer folks.

Well, whether innocent or guilty, Wick Cotter would do to start with. Bud had to start somewhere. He had to get busy, to stay busy, to keep away from Kai.

It was well along toward dark, however, when he finally mustered up courage to leave his cabin. Making a wide detour in order to avoid Kai's cabin, he finally arrived at the high, rocky point that commanded the stretch of beach where Cotter was camped, on the north shore of Sucia Island.

Cotter owned a fine, fast cruiser, which was just putting in. Bud hastily slid down the hill and hid himself in a clump of madroña-trees.

The cruiser came to anchor, and the dingey put off for shore. In the dingey were two people—Cotter and Kai Sei Elvers.

"Why, I might go ride again with you, Mr. Cotter," Kai was saying. "Yes, I enjoy it. I don't get to go anywhere very much, on account of the ducks and pa's rheumatism. Thanks, I will go again—yes, soon. Thanks!"

Bud crawled back up the rocks, took a short cut across the hill, and was waiting for Kai when she turned into the dooryard.

"Where you been, Kai?" Bud's voice was raucous with anger.

Instantly, at his words, at the tone of his voice, Kai's resentment flared hotly. Bud couldn't come and tell her about the thousand dollars, but he could come and be ugly about her taking a boat ride!

"That all you got to say to me, Bud Bradley?"

"Yes, for now it's all. Where you been?"

"I been riding with a gentleman, in a fine boat. I aim to go again."

"Oh, you do! Well, when you sent off a year ago for that box of face-powder, I might have knew you wasn't no kind of woman for me!"

"Hoity toity! Listen, Bud Bradley! Last Fourth of July, the dance at Deer Harbor, you danced three times running

with Essie Waller. I counted. If that hain't bad infidelity, then I don't know what is!"

"You look on the verandy step," countered Bud, his voice trembly. "Look on the verandy step, about ten minutes from now, and you'll find the necktie you knit for me with red into it!"

"Very well, Mr. Bradley! When you lay down the necktie, you just paw around on the step and pick up the polished whale's barnacle you give me for a love-lode. Good evening, Mr. Bradley!"

Bud Bradley, savagely kicking stones and sticks out of his way, made back to his cabin, and presently returned to the Elvers house. He laid down the neck-scarf that Kai had crocheted for him, with lots of red in it, picked up the whale barnacle love-lode, and departed for his cabin.

III

SEVERAL times Kai went riding with Cotter in the cruiser. Once or twice, explaining to Mrs. Gallup, a neighbor, that she, Kai, had work to do, she got Mrs. Gallup to come in for an hour and sit with Captain Zeno.

Cotter, a fellow with bad teeth, had told Kai that she might take the cruiser any time and go out by herself. Cotter explained that he found rowing fine exercise, and that he would be rowing a good bit around among the islands.

With Cotter a mile in the offing, headed for Waldron Island in the dingey, Kai rowed out to the cruiser in her own dory, hauled the anchor, and made away to the eastward. When beyond the ken of any snooping glasses that might be leveled at her from Sucia, she threw out the clutch and let the cruiser drift.

On hands and knees she explored the cruiser, stem to stern. In a forward compartment, near the gas-tank, she found something—a red, green, and gold label with funny writing on it. Kai had not lived all her days surrounded by fish-traps and salmon canneries which employed hundreds of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans not to know what that bit of paper was. It was a label that had slipped from a brass tael can of Pen Yen smoking opium.

Kai turned the cruiser homeward. When she landed, Cotter was waiting for her.

"Glad you went for a ride," he said, giving her a horrible, gap-tooth grin. "Take the boat any time."

Pressing one hand to her bosom, where she had hid the Pen Yen label, Kai smiled back at him.

"I've a bit of news," said Cotter. "A deuced good friend of mine has a ranch on Saturna Island, just on the Canada side. Do you know, he keeps ducks, too. Such ducks as my friend does keep! My friend tells me to pick out some ducks for myself. So I do, six ducks. Now what should I do with the silly squawkers but give them to you? Fancy me with ducks! But I expect to be away for a day or two. Rowing a boat is doing me no end of good. It was a mistake to buy a cruiser. I shall row about a bit, touch at Saturna, put the ducks in a crate, and leave them on the beach near East Point. If you get a letter from me, take my cruiser, put across to Saturna, and pick up the bally ducks. They're yours."

Her hand still pressed above her secret, Kai climbed the hill. Standing beside a pen of her own ducks, she cocked her head and laid her finger alongside her nose in a fee-fi-fo-fum sort of manner.

The supper dishes done, the cabin "red-ded" up, Kai took up her watch on the hill above Cotter's camp.

About nine o'clock, possibly finding the night air less salubrious for rowing than the daytime, Cotter put out to his cruiser and headed it away west, in the direction of Saturna. The moment that Kai was able to make out in what direction the cruiser was bound, she ran down the bank, shoved off her own dory, and followed.

At no great distance from the shore the cruiser's engine shut down, and the boat began to drift. Kai quickened the stroke of her oars. When she had come so close to the cruiser that she feared the creak of laboring oars might betray her, she too drifted.

Now and then she took a cautious dip with an oar and sent the dory in a little closer.

Cotter was leaning over the rail of the cruiser, pawing about in the water with a boat-hook. He was drawing something into the boat—kelp, great armfuls of kelp, the hollow-stemmed seaweed that grows seventy, eighty, a hundred feet in length.

It seemed to Kai that Cotter must have drawn in a whole skiff load of the kelp before he threw in the clutch and started the cruiser, still in the direction of Saturna Island. A row of three or four miles was nothing to Kai Sei, so she went on in the

cruiser's wake, driving the dory on with long, even strokes.

Rather easily she spotted the white hull of the cruiser where it lay at anchor in a bay west of East Point. Back in the woods a small camp-fire gleamed.

Beaching her dory, Kai stole into the tangle of cedar and fir, and crept toward the blaze. Cotter was seated on one side of the fire; on the other was a dark fellow with a scowling, sinister countenance.

"You see, Scat," said Cotter, "this chub Bradley is darned jealous. I'll write his girl. I'll say to her to come to East Point to-morrow night, and the goods will be there. She'll think I mean ducks. I do mean ducks—and something else. This fellow Widgin fetches the mail from Waldron to Sucia. Widgin always tells everybody about everybody else's mail. He's no end of a chaffer, is Widgin. He'll just die laughing telling this chub Bradley some one has written to his girl. The fact is I've watched how it works out, Scat—about always Widgin gives Bradley all the Elvers mail, papers, letters, and all, to carry to the Elvers cabin.

"Get the idea, Scat? What would you do, what would I do, if we laid hands on a letter some one had written to your girl, or mine? Why, we'd open it to see what was what. Sure! Anybody would. Get the idea, Scat—this chub opening a letter to the girl, telling her to come to Saturna, at night, to get the goods! Get the idea?

"He'll watch my cruiser. When she puts off for Saturna, he will follow, and he'll lay in wait for her in the north channel. He'll pick her up when she comes back. He'll want to see what goods she's got. She'll show him the crate of ducks. That won't go down. He'll search the boat, and find what he's looking for. Maybe she'll convince him she hain't a smuggler; but more likely she won't. What's that to us? Meantime, while this little go is on in north channel, we're busy in south channel. Can you beat that scheme, Scat?"

Scat shook his head. The scheme was altogether admirable.

Cotter arose to go. Kai crouched back into the brush and let him pass.

When the cruiser had put out, headed back for Sucia, Kai followed to the beach. Stretched out upon the sands were lengths and lengths of the hollow-stemmed kelp.

Cautiously she slid her dory back into the water and rowed toward home.

Half a mile from Sucia she rested on the oars. A skiff was coming. She crouched down in the boat. At night, a drifting dory may easily be mistaken for a derelict log.

This was Cotter coming. She could tell him by the jerky unevenness of his rowing. He passed her, and kept on in the direction of Waldron Island.

When Kai got to the top of the hill in the rear of her cabin, she looked across the island. A light was shining in a cabin window—Bud's cabin window.

Kai entered the house, lighted a match, and held it up to the face of the little ship's clock. It was after one in the morning.

IV

THE day seemed interminably long. Kai could think of but one thing—the letter Cotter was going to write to her.

Cotter had laid his plan cunningly. Kai couldn't think when her father's weekly maritime news, his occasional letters from the Seamen's Aid, and her own rare missives hadn't been delivered at the cabin by the thick hand of Bud Bradley.

Exactly what would Bud do about this letter from Cotter? Would he open it, read it, and destroy it? Would he open, read, reseal, and deliver it? Would he play square and deliver the letter intact? If Cotter held to his plan, Kai reasoned that before many hours she was going to find out something about Bud.

Kai watched the coming of Widgin's sail dory from Waldron. Bud was at the beach when Widgin landed. From her hilltop station, with her father's old sea-glasses to her eyes, Kai followed every move. Widgin was handing Bud something. Bud turned it over curiously and thrust it into his pocket.

He was coming toward the Elvers cabin.

No! He turned to his own cabin, entered, and closed the door after him.

Widgin had landed with the mail shortly before five o'clock. At six o'clock Bud Bradley was still in his cabin, with her letter.

At half past six, Bud was still in the cabin.

Kai turned into the house and began preparing her father's supper. The door opened, and in walked little Jimmy Gallup, a letter in his hand.

"Bud Bradley gimme this to give to you, Kai."

Kai took the letter and turned it this

way and that against the light of the kitchen lamp. It was soiled, creased, worn, as if it had been worried between nervous fingers. It was so disheveled that she could not definitely say whether it had been opened. It felt damp, as if it might have been held over the snout of a teakettle.

Finally she opened the letter. It was from Cotter. It told Kai to take his cruiser, cross to the easternmost point of Saturna that evening, not earlier than nine o'clock, and pick up the small crate of ducks that she would find upon the beach.

If only she could be sure that Bud had dared to open her letter! But she could not be sure. If he had not opened it, if he had played square, why, poor blundering Bud, for his honesty, would miss the opportunity to make the grandest haul of narcotic drugs ever put across among the islands!

Kai just couldn't risk it. She still loved blundering Bud. She knew she still loved him. She told herself so, looking herself in the eye as she stood before the tiny wall mirror.

She ran to the door and called to Jimmy Gallup. Jimmy, idling along the trail, heard her call and trotted back.

Kai scribbled a sentence upon a bit of paper:

BUD:

Be sure and be in the south channel, *south channel*, to-night about nine o'clock—sure!

KAI.

Jimmy ran as swiftly as his short legs could carry him to Bud's cabin. Presently he returned and handed Kai back her note.

"Bud's gone," said Jimmy. "I could see his dory heading out for Waldron."

Shortly after eight o'clock Kai rowed out to the cruiser, made her dory fast to the cruiser's moorings, and headed the craft toward Saturna Island. About her slender waist she was wearing a black leather belt, and depending from the right side was her father's old navy revolver.

V

It was nearly nine o'clock when Bud reached Waldron Island, and exceedingly dark. He had just beached his dory when, a hundred yards up shore, a skiff put out. Bud could hear the jerky, spasmodic creak of oars.

That would be the greener, Wick Cotter. No one else about rowed like that. Well, Cotter was the fellow Bud wished to see, so

he dragged his own dory back into the water and started out after his man.

Cotter was rowing for all he was worth, and splashing a good bit. Bud, the oarlocks of his dory well greased, the oars well fitted, resting upon leather with the rope wrapping called a Turk's head to hold them in place, rowed on quite as swiftly, but noiselessly.

Gradually overhauling Cotter, Bud was on the point of calling out to him to wait, that Bud wanted a word with him, when Cotter came to a stop. Bud allowed his dory to drift, and crouched low to see what Cotter was doing.

He found that Cotter was hauling in kelp, great armfuls of it—hauling it in very, very carefully and disposing it in the bottom of his boat.

Then came the thud of something striking against the side of Cotter's skiff—a stone, apparently. That kelp had been anchored in place in the channel. Cotter had just drawn in the stone at the end of his line.

With half a dozen powerful strokes, Bud was beside Cotter. The dory and the skiff struck together, rail to rail.

Cotter, with an animal-like howl, sprang to his feet. Straight into Bud's dory he leaped, kicking his own boat away as he jumped. Striking wildly, scratching, gouging, he fell upon the revenuer. With maniacal fury he fought. The dory careened wildly as the two men battled. Now they were rolling in the bottom of the craft; now they were upon their feet. Both fell across a thwart.

Bud fought clear of the madman who was clinging to him, and drove a piston-like stroke with his fist fairly into Cotter's flat face.

Cotter's knees bent. He turned as if on a pivot, and fell backward from the dory. Bud leaped to seize him, and over went the boat.

Bud came to the surface swimming. In three strokes he had the floundering, gurgling Cotter by the shoulder.

No use now to attempt to catch either the dory or the skiff, which had gone whirling away on the flooding tide. It was a swim for it, or go down, both of them.

There was a horrible rattling in Cotter's throat from the water that he had drawn into his lungs. He made a futile, threshing resistance as Bud seized his shoulder, but subsided and became an inert mass that

remained afloat only by virtue of the support of Bud's hand.

Bud started to swim, towing his prisoner with him, holding Cotter with one hand, stroking with the other.

Behind, a blur in the darkness, was the high headland of Waldron Island; ahead was the crescent ridge of Sucia. The tide, swinging in a back eddy, was setting Bud and his burden toward West Bank, a ridge of rock midway between Waldron and Sucia, bare only at low water. Now the tide was flooding, and presently West Bank would be covered six feet deep.

Bud, beginning to weaken under the terrific strain of dragging Cotter and the deadly chill of the water, nevertheless kept stubbornly on. To let go of his prisoner—but no! He remembered that one of the rules in his book said:

Bring forthwith the body of the arrested—

Now that Bud had his hand upon the shoulder of a smuggler, though the detection of the culprit had been something of a fluke, he did not propose to let him go.

At last Bud felt the barnacled rocks of West Bank beneath his feet. He staggered up the reef, dragging Cotter with him. At the very highest point of the reef Bud stood knee deep in water.

Every instant the swirling of the flood tide was gathering strength, and every moment the water was creeping higher, higher, above his knees. Not very much longer would the rock be tenable.

Cupping a hand to his lips, Bud called toward the west, east, north, and south. No answer!

A sudden surge of the tide-rips almost swept him from his footing. He looked down at the form of Cotter, which, from its appearance, might have been a bundle of old clothes heaved overside from some passing ship. Rather easily Bud could have made it to Sucia—alone; but the rules told him to bring in the body of his prisoner.

"The body of the prisoner." That surely meant, dead or alive, bring them in.

Another call Bud sent into the darkness. The water was up to his thighs. He took a fresh grip on Cotter's shoulder, dragged him from the rock, and struck out for Sucia.

He swam on stubbornly, though now he was getting little strangling dashes of the salt water in mouth and nose; he was begin-

ning to have a ringing in his ears. Then he began to experience a peculiar detached feeling, as if he were not in the sea at all, but floating in space.

Rolling loggily in the water, he paused for a brief view of the crescent of Sucia. He wasn't going to make it. The back eddy of the tide was carrying him past the point of Sucia, toward the open waterway of Georgia Strait.

He would never make it—not if he clung to the body of the prisoner. Swimming alone, he might.

He attempted to shift his hands, swimming with the left arm, for a rest, and holding Cotter with the right; but the grip of his left hand upon Cotter's shoulder would not let go. His fingers had stiffened there in a clutch that would not relax.

This couldn't last much longer. Anyway, when they found him, if they ever did, they would find also the body of the prisoner.

No longer was Bud able to swim. Now he was paddling feebly with his right hand, just enough to keep afloat. He knew that it would soon be over, because he was beginning to see flashes of light before his eyes, to hear sounds—a voice calling.

"Bud! Bud!"

A little longer and it would be over—a very little longer!

"Bud! Ahoy, Bud! Can you give me a hail, Bud?"

Why, there were flashes of light! A voice was calling! A boat was coming! Its engine was whirring at the top of its speed! A flash-light was being thrown this way and that, all over the surface of the twisting tide-rips.

An exultant cry sounded from the cruiser. The power-boat swung about, with a dory and a skiff in tow. It was alongside! A girl, with the man's strength that was granted her at that moment, drew Cotter in, drew Bud in, and he fell as limp as a wet sack on top of the body of his prisoner.

The hollow stems of the kelp yielded up fifty pounds of morphin sulphate, contained in glass vials stoppered with paraffined corks. Beneath the grain in a tin that had been set inside the crate of ducks, they found another pound of the drug.

The government agent who came out from Seattle to take over the prisoner—who finally revived under heroic first aid—and to receipt for the illicit drug, said that

the haul of "hop" represented a cash value of more than two hundred thousand dollars.

Also the agent took back with him to Seattle Bud's resignation, written out with an indelible pencil.

VI

BUD BRADLEY, placing a polished whale's barnacle in his pocket, started for the cabin of Kai Sei Elvers.

"I kind of thought, Kai," he said a trifle foolishly. "I kind of thought—"

That was as far as he got. He laid down the love-lode upon the table.

Kai ran and fetched the knitted necktie with lots of red in it, and handed it to Bud.

From another pocket Bud hauled forth a roll of bills.

"I figure we can start duck-farmin', Kai," he said. "I got to start something. I hain't got no job now. I got a thousand dollars, or near it. You see, Kai, them two slacker runaways that I didn't fetch in alive, the government gives me five hundred dollars apiece for 'em. If I'd known, I could just as easy 'a' had three thousand; but a thousand will start us off, I figure."

"Sure, Bud! We got plenty of money to build a cabin and duck-pens, and to buy

more ducks. I sent them six scraggle ducks back to Saturna, where they come from. We got plenty of money, Bud, what you've got and what I got. I knew you'd come and tell me about your thousand. Then, when you did, I aimed to tell you about my reward. You hain't the only party drawing down rewards, Bud. Fetch a look at that!"

Bud's jaw jarred open and remained pendulous.

Kai handed him her reward check from the United States government, five per cent of the value of the contraband drug haul—ten thousand five hundred dollars.

Kai stood smiling gloriously at him. Suddenly her face sobered.

"Just one thing more I got to know, Bud, or I'll be downright miserable. You didn't open my letter, I know. What in the land ever took you squandering over to Waldron, then, where you run onto Cotter?"

"You see, Kai, I begun to figure this Cotter *might* be a smuggler. If so, he wasn't no fitten person to be writing to you. I aimed to run him down, tell him not to write no more, and lick him if he didn't agree."

"Bud! Bud! I just know you're goin' to be the skookumest duck-farmer north of the equator!"

RIVER MUSIC

RIVER, be any sweetness in my song,
Not mine but yours it is; so many a time
I strove to catch the ripple of your tongue,
The syllables of your mysterious rime—
Dactyls and spondees in an even flow,
With the cesura of some pebbly bar.
So pondered I old Vergil long ago—
Latin still fresh and running as you are,
With many a mirrored rush and swaying star.

But as through the old verse a magic ran,
Baffling the ear, too subtle to divine—
A sorcery no prosodist might scan—
So is it, river, with your magic line;
So far the measure of your music goes,
But something sings below it all the time—
Something mysterious that flows and flows,
Something that doth with the eternal chime,
And laughs at all the little laws of rime.

Richard Le Gallienne

Jimmy Busby's Baby

AND THE STROKE OF GENIUS THAT WON THE YAPS THEIR
FIRST BASEBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

By Jack Casey

IT was Patrolman Patrick Nolan who won the pennant for the Yaps last year. The newspapers had it that the Yaps won it themselves. Well, the Yaps might have gone through the motions and all that, but they would never have won it if it had not been for Pat Nolan—and, of course, Jimmy Busby's baby.

Some day, if ever you get out this way, drop into police headquarters and look up Pat Nolan. You won't find him anything out of the ordinary to look at. He would never inspire any gifted writer to sit up nights dopping out articles about his skull, and he couldn't go on the stage and be a matinée hero, having enough *avoids* hung over his frame to ballast a battle-ship. Just the same he has a gold-mounted, engraved pass to the Yaps' ball-park for life—which means that he can park his flat feet in the grand stand any day he wants to, and that's more than a lot of famous men can say.

Ask Pat what are the Yaps' chances for the flag, any year at all, and you will hear a discourse on optimism that will make a Bolshevik's dream look blacker than a well. Not only will Patrick picture the Yaps to you as just a little better than the old Cubs, Athletics, and Baltimore Orioles rolled into one, but he will dwell eloquently and at length upon Jimmy Busby, whom he regards as the best of good fellows and the superman of baseball. He'll tell you proudly that he's godfather to Jimmy's baby.

Ask him if it's true that he won the pennant for the Yaps last year, and his gray eyes will twinkle. He will stroke his chin thoughtfully, park his plug in the other cheek, and drawl slowly:

"Well, the boys said I did, but I don't think so. Better call it a double play and give me an assist. If it hadn't been for

Jimmy's baby I couldn't have done nothing at all; so we ought to give the kid the put-out."

"How did it happen?" you will ask.

Then Patrick Nolan will tell you the story I am going to tell you now.

II

To begin with, the Yaps never came by that name through any deficiency in their mental capacities. The first year Hank Hennessy was made manager of the team, which was three years ago, a reporter looking for a feature story asked Hank if he would divulge his past. The team was opening its spring training jaunt in California, but it might as well have been in Greenland for all the thawing out Hank would do concerning his personal history.

"You want to know all about me?" he queried in his gruff way, which reminded one of an umpire. "Where I was born, how I started life, and all that? What difference does it make where I was born, and whether I started life shoeing mules or currying snakes? The thing the fans are concerned about is not where I started, but where the team is going to finish. Write what you like about the team, but leave me out of it!"

Because Hank was so undiplomatic in his treatment of the scribe, who happened to be a highly paid feature-writer with a self-appraisal a bit above par, said scribe ruffled quicker than a hen with a flock of new chicks. Attacking his typewriter in a sardonic mood, he polished off a masterpiece that made Hank wish newspapers were printed in a place where their editions would probably be ashes as fast as they came from the presses. The reporter, who was a Republican, described Hank as an individual fit for nothing better in life than

a portfolio in a Democratic Cabinet; an individual who refused to divulge his birthplace, probably because he was born in the island of Yap.

That was quite enough for the sport editors of the papers. They promptly labeled the team as the Yaps—a label which, much to Hank's discomfiture, stayed glued.

The Yaps were a smart collection of ball-players, just the same, and showed nothing outlandish in their deportment on the diamond. With Jimmy Busby at second, a pivotal king considered on a par with the best of them, the Yaps boasted an infield which, when it came to letting a base-hit leak through it, was tighter than a drum. Riley at first, Moran at short, Ward at third, and the only Jimmy Busby at the second station—it was a quartet which, for an impregnable defense, made Stonewall Jackson resemble a picket fence. You had to have rabbit feet and a special indulgence to poke a safe blow through that foursome.

Offensively, too, they were just about as good. Busby, on bases, was a hound. He was faster than a patented dye. He looked on bases as a crook looks on a tray full of gems—there to be stolen; and he pilfered them religiously.

He could hit, too. He was wicked in a pinch, and fussier than a red-headed débütante in a hat-shop at getting what he wanted. You had to pitch to Busby. Add to that his habit of making a pitcher lose his Angora quicker than a candidate forgets promises, and you have reason enough for Pat Nolan or any other fan regarding Jimmy as a baseball superman.

Jimmy had one weak point, however. He was high-strung and nervous—as nervous as a St. Vitus's dance addict listening to a prima donna reach for high C, or an apartment-house tenant with insomnia parked below a cornet enthusiast. Yes, Jimmy was a nervous man, but a human dynamo, nevertheless. Great as were Riley, Moran, and Ward—and they were all sweet ball-players—Jimmy Busby was the battery that galvanized that infield into action, the human pepper-box that had them all on their toes every second they were out on the field. Without Jimmy, the infield looked like a flag at half-mast. It wasn't the same infield at all. It resembled the remnants of an amputation.

But Jimmy was seldom out. Chattering like a magpie, fighting, yelling, pleading, Jimmy was in there day after day. He

would as soon have missed kissing his pretty wife before leaving the house as fail to show up at the ball-park.

The papers gave Jimmy credit, last summer, for having the Yaps out in front when August and some sizzling weather arrived simultaneously. It looked like a pennant, the first the team had ever garnered, and the town was getting feverish. The sport scribes were writing things like this:

If the pitching staff will stay put for the grind through August and September, the gonfalon will be ours with no arguments. Jimmy Busby cannot pitch, but you can leave it to him to see that the rest of the team brings home the bacon.

If Jimmy Busby had been single, he might have pulled the Yaps through to a pennant without concern. Then Patrolman Patrick Nolan would have been left out of the picture entirely, and would have gone to his last rest minus a lot of glory and a gold-mounted baseball pass that is the envy of the whole force. But Jimmy was not only married, but much married. Only the season before he had given the society editors a jolt by eloping with a local belle whom they had slated for a foreign count, at the very least. Jimmy had plucked her from under the nose, so to speak, of her lorgnetted mother—who, before she became the wife of a chewing-gum magnate, had been the democratic daughter of a corner-grocery man, in the days when sugar never got scarce and crackers came only in barrels.

Jimmy, I am telling you, plucked Virginia Jones from the lap of luxury and established her in the lap of what ten thousand a year will get for a married couple—which isn't so much nowadays; and immediately the ornate doors of the Jones mansion closed to Mrs. Jimmy Busby. In the opinion of the Joneses, she had pulled what ball-players refer to as a boner; so they chalked up an unpardonable error against her. She had married a healthy, active, athletic young man with a college education and a baseball occupation, instead of following their advice and choosing an anemic human question-mark with a sad expression and a lot of money he never earned.

Just as the Yaps were bursting into a hot pace on the heels of the pennant, in early August, the clubhouse was surprised one afternoon, after Jimmy had shower-bathed and gone, to see big Ed Hurley, the fork-side pitcher, stop Turkish-toweling his hide long enough to say:

"Whad d'ye think, gang? Strictly confidential—wasn't supposed to peep, so don't say where it came from, but Jimmy's expecting the little old stork to flap in with a bundle of joy some time this month!"

"You don't say!" sagely observed Pete Breden, the big catcher, halting his earnest endeavors to make six thin hairs do the work of a rug on the bald spot at the back of his skull.

"That ought to reconcile her folks, sure enough, and let Jimmy in on some of that chewin'-gum jack," said Ward, yanking at a fractious shoe-string.

"Jimmy's wife sure is a pip!" said Bill Keller, right-fielder. "Wonder what Jimmy's pullin' for, a boy or a girl?"

"Boy, by all means," said Hurley. "B-o-y, boy. He's nuts to have a son. Says he's going to name him after a big-leaguer, too."

"Another dig at her folks, I suppose," said Ward.

"Well, you can't blame him," said Schaeffer, with his Dutch accent. "Jimmy's a nice boy, good enough for anybody. Wonder what he'll name it?"

"He's sweet on Alexander. Maybe he'll call it Alex," said Shoe-String Sherry, so named because he made more trick catches below his knees than any outfielder in the league. "Alex Busby wouldn't be bad."

"Thought he liked Walter Johnson," said Breden, juggling a pair of dice.

"He does," replied Sherry. "Likes Ring Lardner, too."

"Lardner don't play ball," said Breden.

"He don't have to," returned Sherry.

"He's made enough dough to buy a ball-club just telling the world what a lot of dogs us big-leaguers are."

"Ring Busby wouldn't be very good for a name," said Hurley. "Sounds like a bird giving an order to a valet."

"Hans Busby wouldn't be bad," suggested Schaeffer, "if he named it after Wagner."

"Pipe down, pipe down!" yelled Ward. "Where do you get that Dutch christening stuff?"

Schaeffer ducked a wet towel that hit the wall with a resounding thwack.

"If he wants to name that baby after a famous big-leaguer, he doesn't have to look further than me," said George Graney, who had just come up from the sticks, and had been getting splinters in a second-hand uniform warming the bench.

"They named Bonehead Barry after you, George," shouted Hurley. "Ain't you satisfied?"

Jimmy Busby was not surprised to learn, a couple of days later, that his secret had leaked out—as secrets of that kind generally do; neither was he any more displeased than is the average prospective father who finds his universe suddenly revolving about the prospective event. There was, in fact, nothing unique whatever about the matter, unless it be the way in which Jimmy came by his information.

Rusty, the red-headed bat-boy, slid up to his side on the bench just before the start of a game with the Hens.

"What kind of a dog have you got, Jimmy?" he asked, gazing wistfully up at the face of the second-sacker.

"Dog?" echoed Jimmy, surprised. "I haven't any dog."

"Honest, Jimmy?"

"Absolutely."

"Gee, that's funny!"

"What's funny about it?"

"Why," said the bat-boy slowly, "I heard Graney telling Hurley that if you called it Stupid he could feel flattered."

Jimmy smiled. He picked up and weighted one of his favorite bats.

"You ain't got no dog, really, Jimmy?" asked Rusty.

"No, honest Injun, Rust. Graney was talking about a raccoon a bird wants to give me."

Just what a raccoon was the bat-boy did not know, but he had long since learned not to ask too many questions on the Yap bench. He presumed it was something dumb, or it wouldn't be named Stupid.

III

IF Jimmy Busby hadn't set his heart on naming his son after a famed ball-player, he might have considered calling him after the President of the United States, or the great military hero of France. Warren Harding Busby he thought rather snappy; Napoleon Busby classical. But if he was going to consider the names of the really great in history, he considered the name of Alexander as neat as any. In choosing Alexander he could kill two birds with one stone, naming young Busby not only after Alexander the Great, but also after the great Alexander, famed pitcher of the Cubs.

Alexander was the only name he knew of in baseball that combined such possibilities.

Having an Alexander Busby in the family would, he knew, prove highly pleasing to his wife's people, the chewing-gum Joneses, if they ever became reconciled to the daughter who had displeased them. He reflected that while they congratulated him for christening his son after such a famous classical hero, he could quietly chuckle to himself, knowing that he had done no such thing, but had named the boy after the baseball Alexander.

He considered Napoleon but briefly. The only Napoleon of fame as a ball-player used the name as his first, not as his last; and this wouldn't do at all. Unless the proud father called the new arrival Napoleon Lajoie Busby, the world would never know that he had christened it after a baseball star; and he considered that naming his son after a ball-player was of far more importance than calling him after one who had been merely a world-famed conqueror.

Jimmy cogitated the important matter through the month of August, and the Yaps continued to lead the league.

"A pennant, sure!" was the verdict that buzzed from fandom.

Then it happened.

Jimmy Busby's baby was a girl. It was born on the first day of September, and immediately the Yaps' chances for the pennant started to vanish. From a fighting, tearing, keyed-up, enthusiastic leader, Jimmy Busby became listless and indifferent in his every move. He seemed to droop like a withered bloom; and when Jimmy Busby drooped, the team drooped with him.

It was like seeing a fiery race-horse coming into the stretch, every muscle taut, every nerve extended, nostrils aquiver, the essence of effort; and then to close your eyes and open them to find the same animal under a blanket returning to the paddock, head down, tail limp, and a sag in his every move. That is what the Yaps looked like the day after Jimmy Busby's baby arrived.

A girl!

Jimmy was totally unprepared for it. Just why he was unprepared he never knew. It had never occurred to him or Mrs. Busby that their offspring might be of the feminine gender.

With Mrs. Busby the probable reason was that she wanted a baby, just a wonderful baby to fondle and fuss over, and in wanting a wonderful baby she was satisfied to have it wonderful of any sex what-

ever. Not so Jimmy. He had set his heart on a son—"a real big-leaguer," as he put it. If the boy didn't turn out to be a United States Senator, he would be a three-hundred hitter like his father, and would get cigars named after him.

So sure of this was Jimmy that at the hospital, where he paced the corridors while the baby's arrival was being helped as much as possible, he repeated to himself over and over the name he had selected for him.

"Alexander Busby—Alex Busby—they call the great pitcher Alex—Aleck Busby!"

He couldn't decide which he liked best.

And then a nurse rubber-heeled her way up to him and abruptly interrupted his mental baptismal service by softly telling him that it was all over, and that if he would follow her he could see his wife and maybe his—

She did not finish, and Jimmy came to with a start.

"How is he?" he asked eagerly. "Is he a humdinger? He isn't a left-hander, is he? What does he look like?"

"Why, er-r-r—" The nurse looked at him, hesitant as how to begin. "Why, er-r-r—Mr. Busby, you see, ah-h-h—"

"Nothing wrong with him, is there?" asked the world's greatest second-sacker, alarmed.

"Oh, no, Mr. Busby, nothing wrong whatever," purred the nurse, wishing that it was her night off and that somebody else had the job before her. She could see that this gentleman wasn't prepared for what was going to prove a disappointment. That was the way with these fellows—they all wanted sons.

"That's good!" said Jimmy, relieved, fanning himself with his straw hat. "You had me worried for a minute. Here!" He handed her five dollars. "Let me see him quick. He's the bird I've been waiting for months to shake hands with!"

"But, Mr. Busby—" faltered the nurse, her brow beading with perspiration as she halted the new father by grasping his arm.

Jimmy wheeled around and glared at her.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Why, Mr. Busby," said the nurse, almost ready to cry, "he isn't a boy—he's a girl. You have a daughter."

"What?"

Jimmy Busby's five-dollar straw hat clattered to the tiled corridor and described a circle on its rim. Jimmy Busby stood gazing at the nurse with popping eyes.

"What did you say?" he asked thickly, yanking his soft collar from his throat. "What did you say?"

"It's a girl," repeated the nurse—"a lovely little girl."

Jimmy stood glued to the floor. He couldn't believe it. It couldn't seem to penetrate his brain that he did not have a son. A girl? She might be lovely, she might be a Diana, a Venus, or even a Mary Pickford when she grew up, but what of it? You couldn't name a daughter Alexander. You couldn't call a girl after a big-leaguer.

The nurse startled him. She was talking again—talking in that low professional tone that was so irritating. He would rather she had shouted at him.

"Your wife is calling for you," he heard her say.

Of course! Of course, Virginia was calling for him, and here he was thinking only of his disappointment at not getting the son he had set his heart on. He was selfishly thinking of his own disappointment when the greatest little pal a man could be blessed with had just gone into the Valley of the Shadow to be crowned with the most glorious of diadems—motherhood. He would run to her side and comfort her, and not let her see that he was so bitterly disappointed. He would pretend that a daughter was everything, that it had not made a bit of difference to him. He would forget that he had planned to name his child after a big-leaguer.

IV

BUT Jimmy Busby couldn't forget. Two weeks later, when Mrs. Busby was back home, weak but happy, only by an effort could Jimmy be animated. He moped and became stagnant. From leading the league, the Yaps fell to a tie for first place with the Nuts. They clung there for two days and then slid into third place, three games behind the leaders and a game below the Tigers in second place. The morale of the team seemed to be warped, and all because Jimmy Busby had developed a listlessness unbelievable.

Jimmy didn't behave like a spoiled child about it. He was game. He tried hard—tried to be like the Jimmy of old and to engender a fighting spirit, not only in the team, but in himself; but he couldn't do it. Something seemed to have gone out of him. Where he had been afire a month ago for the championship, ready to fight and fall

for it, now he could feel no interest whatever in what a pennant or a world series would mean.

He didn't wish to feel that way. He didn't desire to be selfish. He wanted to help the boys to the glory and profit that a pennant and a cut in the autumn classic of the diamond would mean. He coveted that flag, not for himself, but for his teammates; but the effort wasn't in him.

Unknown to himself, he had been battling all summer, not for a pennant, but for a son. The joy of approaching fatherhood, the joy of his first child—his boy—a son—that had been the incentive for the struggle. Daily he had chattered and fought, instilling the spirit of combat into his team-mates, making them play better baseball than they were ordinarily capable of.

Why? Because he wanted the honor of having driven a team to a pennant? No. He thought it was that, but it wasn't. Under the strain of worry for a wife approaching motherhood, and keyed up with the desire for a son, he had battled along on his nerve. He had driven himself terrifically without realizing it. Then had come the great disappointment, and he had collapsed like a punctured balloon.

It now appeared that the Yaps' pennant prospects were almost hopeless. They still had a chance, but only if the team suddenly braced, and if Jimmy Busby shook off his mechanical spirit and became the old firebrand Jimmy. That would be a miracle, and not a baseball writer was optimist enough to expect it.

Something had happened, and the scribes of the press guessed at what it was. They said that the strain had been too much for the Yaps, that they were blowing up in the stretch. The home stretch is the test of gameness, whether in a race-horse, a sprinter, or a ball-club. It looked as if the Yaps—a good but not a great team—had succumbed to the strain. They didn't have the stamina to keep up the pace they had set. It takes both stamina and luck to win a pennant.

Every day there was a conference in the clubhouse.

"Brace up!" Manager Hank Hennessy would beg. "My God, fellers, we got a pennant in our mitts, and you're letting it get away from you. Get out there and fight! Get to-day's game, and we'll surely get to-morrow's. Plow into 'em! Raise ructions!"

And they would file out on the diamond and lose another game, probably because two or three of the enemy's runners would beat a fielded ball by a step. It was the difference between mechanical fielding and the bright, snappy work that wins pennants. Everybody tried hard, but the whip didn't snap as it used to. Jimmy Busby wasn't the same Jimmy Busby, and the team wasn't the same team. They couldn't snap because there was no snap in them. Jimmy had been the snapper.

Hurley put a friendly arm about the second-sacker as they left the park together one afternoon, after losing a ten-inning game by a single run.

"What is it, Jimmy?" he asked. "Ever since you became a daddy you haven't been the same. You play ball, you yell, and you appear to fight as hard as ever, but you don't do it in the same way. We aren't in a slump, but you are. What's the trouble?"

"Ed," said Jimmy sadly, "I can't shake it. I'm trying as hard as ever, but I don't seem to have the same punch in me. I guess I was too set on having a son. When a girl showed up instead, I wasn't prepared for it."

The big fielder was a daddy himself.

"But, Jimmy, you're proud of your little daughter, ain't you? Don't you just love her?"

"Proud of her? You bet I am!" said Jimmy. "But—well, it isn't the same, Ed. I was heart and soul set on a boy. Had his name all selected. Was crazy, as you know, to name him after a big-leaguer. Was going to call him after Alex."

"Well, ye gods, Jimmy, don't let that break you up," interrupted Hurley. "Name the girl after a big-leaguer."

Jimmy smiled sadly.

"I wish I could!" he said.

V

It was the 20th of September and the eve of the series with the Nuts, league leaders—a series which would decide whether or not the Yaps would remain in the race for the pennant. In fourth place, six full games behind the leaders, the Yaps had to do what baseball writers were frank enough to believe they could not do—win five out of seven games to be played in four days on their home grounds.

The fact that the games—two of them postponed ones, to be played as double-headers—were on the home grounds was

in the Yaps' favor, and would ordinarily have been an inestimable asset, had the team been playing with its former keenness and vigor; but its present in-and-out style of play left its fondest supporters dubious of its ability to take from the steady-playing leaders even three of the seven games. To win five was apparently impossible, and it looked, as the scribes put it, very much like curtains for the Yaps.

"Now if you birds would only get it into your beans that you're the best ball-club in the league, and go out and skin these Nuts alive, we'd grab off that pennant so fast we'd make the rest of these first division teams look like a switch-engine on a grade!"

It was Manager Hank Hennessy raving in his most voluble manner. He paced the clubhouse floor, tugging at his soft collar, and every now and then pounding his horny right fist on a locker door.

"Nuts, are they?" he yelled. "Well, treat 'em like nuts! Crack 'em wide open! Win the first two games, and they'll crumple faster than a lot o' paper-shell pecans. Walk on 'em, growl at 'em, scare 'em, fight 'em! Get 'em on the run, and we'll clean up this series and nothin' will stop us. We got to get this pennant, that's all there is to it. Do you hear? We got to get it!"

Everybody heard. When Hank whispered, he could be heard three blocks away. Now he was talking, and, as Ward put it, the eagle on the City Hall tower was vibrating from the rumble. Hank had been calling them from behind the plate for so many years that he couldn't order a plate of soup without every waiter in the restaurant dropping his tray, thinking a union boss had drifted in and was calling a strike. Hank had sneezed outside a zoo once, and two women had been crushed in the scramble to see the lions fed.

He rumbled on for an hour, and then all the boys adjusted their hats and went out, Hank's labored and heated speech having made as much of an impression on them as a foot-bath would on a duck. The Yaps did not need any discourse from their manager to convince them that they were the best ball-club in the league. They already believed that, and from the beginning of the season they had expected to win the pennant. The fact that they were not doing it was as much of a mystery to them as to Hank. They had certainly been trying. Only the dash of Jimmy Busby had been

missing, and few of the players seemed to be aware of the deficiency.

Jimmy looked and played in apparently the same earnest, fighting manner that he had from the start of the season, but it wasn't the same. Jimmy knew that. The spirit he could not muster was the spirit the team lacked—the spirit that would have put a dozen lost games into the winning column, and would have had the club so far out in front that the pennant would have been a certainty.

Jimmy left the clubhouse, climbed into his roadster, and started for home. It was an open date, and there was no practise to labor through. A rest, at this time, seemed more important than practise—a rest that would quiet nerves and ease muscles preparatory to a series likely to prove more bitter than a world series.

If the Nuts could clean up, taking the entire seven games, they would have the pennant practically won. Jimmy cogitated this matter thoughtfully as he drove mechanically through several traffic-muddled side streets into the boulevard, and headed eastward. He wished some miracle would suddenly happen to him—a miracle that would, after the fashion of Aladdin's famed lamp, convert him into an enthusiastic, fiery demon to go forth on the morrow flaming victory.

Before he realized it, he had stopped before the pretty red-roofed bungalow that was his home. He had been wishing all the way, nor could he remember having seen a single thing since leaving the ball-park, thirty minutes before.

Stepping from his car and crossing a well-barbered lawn, Jimmy circled the house. Behind it, under a cherry-tree, he found Mrs. Jimmy and a wicker perambulator, in which, beneath mosquito-netting, reposed the center of their lives. The chubby, pink-cheeked baby was asleep, so Jimmy kissed only his wife. He sat down on the rustic bench, leaned forward, and gazed into the baby-carriage.

The tiny girl looked mighty sweet lying there with her pudgy fists doubled, and projecting from under the robe that covered her.

"She sure is a peach!" thought Jimmy. "If she had only been a boy, and I could have named her after a big-leaguer! If—"

He gazed at her pensively. So far, she had not been named. The diplomatic Mrs. Jimmy had sensed the disappointment the

baby had brought her husband, and had not even made a suggestion on the subject. To friends who called and inquired, she said they were awaiting the arrival of her father and mother from Europe to attend the christening.

As a matter of fact, the chewing-gum Joneses had been abroad six months, and were in ignorance of the arrival of a granddaughter. Had they been at home, and had they contemplated attending the christening, nobody would have been more surprised than Mrs. Jimmy; but, as has been stated, she was a diplomatic young woman. To her, nothing mattered but Jimmy and the baby; and she did not care what she told her friends, so long as Jimmy wasn't bothered.

"Think you'll beat the Nuts?" she asked, rubbing a pretty hand caressingly on the sleeve of his Norfolk coat.

"Annihilate them!" he said pleasantly.

Jimmy was a model for married professionals and business men. He never carried his troubles home from the ball-park. His wife knew no excuses for the team's failures to win. In regard to every coming contest he was an optimist.

"But," smiled Mrs. Jimmy, knowing her husband's nature, "it's going to be a fight, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Jimmy. "We ought to walk away with them."

Mrs. Jimmy gave him up. Laughing, she rose and announced that she was going to see about dinner.

"Take Snookums for a walk," she called back at him.

Jimmy laughed after her, knowing that in making such a prophecy about the coming series he was fooling nobody but himself—least of all his wife, who knew as much baseball as Jimmy. He pushed the perambulator out of the yard to the sidewalk and started up the avenue toward the boulevard.

VI

If the city fathers had not erected a police-box at the near corner of that avenue and boulevard, and if Patrolman Patrick Nolan had not been engaged in ringing in his four-o'clock call that September afternoon, just where the Yaps would have ended that year is problematical. They might have finished first, but you could never convince Jimmy Busby, or twenty-four other stalwart athletic wearers of Yap uni-

forms, that they would. If they had finished second, it wouldn't have mattered, anyway; but because smiling Pat Nolan happened to be at that corner at exactly the moment when Jimmy Busby wheeled his baby toward him, the Yaps won their first pennant and a world series, and Pat Nolan came into such glory as he had never in his most imaginative moments dared to dream of.

Nolan had just slammed shut the door of the blue police-box, and was resuming his daily massage of the pavement up the boulevard to his next port of call, when he spotted Jimmy.

"Well, well, if it ain't Mr. Jimmy Busby!" he called with a smile. "An' pushin' a baby-carriage, will ye?"

Jimmy smiled broadly and rolled his vehicle to a stop in front of Nolan. He liked the big policeman.

"How are you, Pat?" he said.

Nolan ignored the question.

"I've seen ye stand up to Walter Johnson's smoke, spank 'em off Dusty Mails, an' bust a fast one on Coveleski for a homer," said Nolan; "but this is the first time I ever saw ye stand up to a baby-carriage, Mr. Busby."

"Takes a brave man to do this, Pat," said Jimmy. "Any one can stand up to smoke-ball pitching. How do I look?"

"Like a gentleman," replied Nolan. "I heard ye was a daddy. How does it feel? Wait 'll ye have seven, like meself!"

"Keep on and you'll have a ball-team," said Jimmy.

"Can't be done," said the policeman. "I drew two girls—God bless 'em!" He stooped over the perambulator. "Do you mind?" he asked, drawing up the mosquito-netting to get a full look at what was beneath it.

Jimmy shook his head.

"What is it—a boy or a girl?" asked Nolan, an expression of paternal kindness creeping into his good-natured face.

"Girl," answered Jimmy shortly.

"My, an' she's a beauty," said Nolan. "She's a home-run, Mr. Jimmy, that's what she is! What have ye named her?"

Jimmy hesitated.

"We haven't named her yet," he said.

Pat Nolan straightened up quickly and eyed the ball-player.

"Why don't ye name her after a big-leaguer?" he said with eager enthusiasm.

Jimmy winced.

"Name a girl after a big-leaguer?" he echoed, amazed. "Don't jolly me, Pat, please!" He held up a restraining hand. "When you say that, you're hitting me in the solar plexus. I expected a son, and had planned to do that very thing; but she came. Boy, how I wish I could name her after a big-leaguer!"

"Wish ye could?" said the policeman. "Why can't ye?"

He leaned forward eagerly. Jimmy searched his face to see if he was serious.

"Why can't I?" he asked. "How can I?"

"How can ye?" shouted Nolan. "Can't ye name her after the greatest hitter in the world? Can't ye call her Babe Ruth?"

VII

JIMMY BUSBY eyed the big policeman in amazement. Unconsciously he leaned forward and grasped the handle of the carriage for support. Then he smiled and muttered like a man in a trance.

"Babe Ruth! Babe Ruth Busby! And I never thought of it! I never thought of it—never once thought of it!"

A pedestrian, coming along a few minutes later, broke into a run a block away. He saw what looked like a wild man ferociously battling with a policeman. Breathlessly he hurried toward them. He didn't know whether he would help the arm of the law or not, but he didn't want to miss anything interesting.

He arrived in time to hear Jimmy Busby shout for the fiftieth time:

"Pat, it never once occurred to me! And they say I'm a smart ball-player! I'm a dummy!" And for the fiftieth time he pumped Nolan's hand vigorously. "Wait until I tell the boys! They never knew how this thing had hit me. Wait till I tell them what Pat Nolan has done! If you don't get a pass for life to our ball-park, I'll eat every inch of concrete in the place! Why, Pat, we'll murder those Nuts now! We'll take every game and get the pennant! I feel like a new man. I am a new man, Pat!"

Nolan was too much excited to note the crowd that was gathering.

"Wasn't nothin' at all, Mr. Busby. It just came to me like any idea would. Sure ye're welcome to it. It's an honor to do somethin' fer a great man like you. Sure it's nothin' at all."

"Nothing at all, is it?" said Jimmy.

"It's just going to get us that old pennant! Nothing at all? Why, it's wonderful! It's—"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Busby! Tut, tut!"

Nolan held up his hand. Then he looked about him and observed the growing group of puzzled and interested spectators.

"Well, an' what's all this?" He turned to Jimmy and indicated their audience. "On with yez! On with yez!" Majestically he scattered the crowd before him. "Can't two gentlemen have a quiet conversation without the likes of yez pilin' up to take the words out of their mouths? On with yez, I say!"

The crowd slowly melted, and the policeman again turned to Jimmy.

"A man has no chance of having privacy nowadays," he observed.

Jimmy smiled and gazed at his tiny daughter, who had awakened.

"Babe Ruth Busby!" he cried at her. "Babe Ruth Busby!" Stooping suddenly, he kissed her. "Here!" he cried, straightening up. "Shake hands with Babe Ruth Busby, Pat!"

The policeman gingerly pushed down a huge finger.

"Babe Ruth Busby," Jimmy went on, peering down above the pretty pink face, "shake hands with your godfather, Mr. Patrick Nolan!"

"Oh, Jimmy!" said Nolan quickly. "Do you mean it?"

"Do I mean it?" replied Busby. "I'd like to see anybody in the world try to be her godfather but Pat Nolan!"

Nolan held out his hand.

"Ye're the only guy in the world I'd go into a Protestant church for, but I'll do it!"

They shook hands gravely.

VIII

THE night the Yaps clinched the pennant, Jimmy Busby's daughter was christened. Pat Nolan will always remember that evening. Not only did he become godfather to the daughter of the famous Jimmy Busby, but he went home in a taxi-

cab with four renowned ball-players, and climbed into bed with something tucked under his pillow which he clutched all night like a boy of six. It was a gold-mounted life pass to the Yaps' ball-park. On it was engraved:

TO PAT NOLAN, FROM THE YAPS.

No wonder the chief took him off the beat and gave him a soft job at headquarters, where you will always find him ready to talk baseball twenty-four hours a day.

The story should end here, but it doesn't. Two days after Jimmy's daughter became Babe Ruth Busby, the doors of the chewing-gum Joneses' mansion swung open again to Mrs. Jimmy. There ensued a touching scene of reconciliation, which carried with it Mr. Jones's invitation to his son-in-law to become a partner in the chewing-gum business. And it came about so unexpectedly!

Jimmy was playing at the baby—she wasn't old enough to be played with—when the telephone buzzed. He answered it.

"My dear boy," said a voice, "we just got in this minute. When I read in New York what you had done, I sat down and cried. I couldn't believe it. And we've been so mean to you! You bring Virginia and the baby right over to dinner!"

Jimmy was staggered. He didn't know what he had done that would cause such a change in his mother-in-law's manner.

"Wait a minute," he choked. "Virginia wants to talk to you."

He called his wife, and there followed an animated telephone conversation, punctuated with tears and sighs. Then Mrs. Jimmy hung up and faced him, her face radiant.

"She thinks you're wonderful!"

"But why?" asked Jimmy. "I didn't do anything."

"Yes, you did—you named the baby after her. Mother's name is Ruth."

"Well, I'll be darned!" said the great second-sacker of the Yaps. "I never thought of that!"

THE SUNNY MIND

In morbid thoughts we never find
Refreshment of the heart or mind.
If robbed of sunshine and of dew,
A Provence rose would turn to rue.

Hamilton Williams

The Stonehill Mystery*

A THRILLING STORY OF SUBURBAN LIFE

By Lee Thayer

Author of "The Unlatched Door," "The Mystery of the Thirteenth Floor," etc.

MORGAN CARRINGTON has disappeared from his home at Stonehill, a residential suburb of New York. His household—which consists of Mrs. Louise Carrington, the widow of his half-brother, her daughter Patricia, and two colored servants, Sam and Lily—is naturally much distressed, and its alarm is intensified by the fact that on the morning of his disappearance there was found, fastened to the back door of the house, a paper inscribed "Watch out—your time is come."

Patricia Carrington enlists the aid of a neighbor, Dr. Stuart Ogden Stafford, whose name is abbreviated by his friends to "Dr. S. O. S." The doctor learns that when Carrington left home he went to the city, where he called at the Carstairs Trust Company to withdraw his money deposited there, and also a fund belonging to his nephew, Edward Driscoll, who is serving in the army. The missing man also visited his lawyer, Franklin Thornton, and added to his will a significant codicil providing that in case of his disappearance the will should not be proved for a year.

Being in urgent need of money, Patricia puts a "to hire" sign on her uncle's car, and plies to and from the railway-station. One of her passengers is a good-looking young soldier who asks her to take him to the house of Mr. Morgan Carrington. She tells him she happens to know that Morgan Carrington is not at home, and he goes back to New York, evidently much interested in the girl chauffeur, while Patricia wonders if he can be her cousin, Ned Driscoll.

XIV

"YOU'RE quite sure, Pat, that this is the same young man?" asked Dr. Stafford.

"Quite, quite sure, Dr. S. O. S."

Patricia and the doctor were standing side by side, before the long table in Dr. Stafford's living-room. Upon it, under the shaded light, lay a large photograph. It represented a group of men—boys, rather—dressed in somewhat scanty apparel and holding long oars in their hands. On the breast of each a large "H" was conspicuously displayed. Patricia's slender finger indicated one of the group.

"Allowing for the difference in clothes, and for the fact that he's wearing a funny little mustache now, it's the same man," she continued. "He's older, of course, and I didn't see him without his cap, but I'm sure it's the same."

"Well," said the doctor, considering the story of her afternoon adventure, which Pat had excitedly narrated, "it certainly would seem probable that the man was

Ned Driscoll; but don't you think it was odd that he didn't tell you who he was? Not at first, I mean, but later. Even though, as you say, Ned has never seen the house, there's the number on the back steps as well as on the front, and if he's at all observant he must have known that it was the place he was looking for. He heard Lily call your name, and he could hardly fail to guess who you must be. Your uncle would surely have written him all about you and your mother being with him here at the old house, else how would he have known the address?"

"Yes," said Pat. "I've been puzzling about that. I can't see, exactly, why he wouldn't have owned up if he knew who I was. I didn't think about the number on the back steps. You are clever, Dr. S. O. S. You think of everything, I believe. It seems as if he must have known; but he must have been rather staggered at finding Uncle Morgan away from home, and me running a taxi. That must have given him a lot to think about. I wonder what he thought!"

* Copyright, 1921, by Lee Thayer—This story began in the November (1921) number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

The doctor, looking at her flushed face, in which amusement and a pleasurable excitement were charmingly blended, imagined that he could guess some of the young soldier's fancies.

He glanced again at the boyish face in the picture. It was a good face, he decided, a merry, happy-go-lucky sort of face—untried, it was true, but it seemed to indicate that its owner might be expected to go far in any undertaking which should present itself as desirable.

"Well, there's one thing we can be pretty sure of," he said after a moment. "If it is your cousin, he'll be turning up again before long. By the way, where did you find this picture?"

"I found it just by accident," Pat rejoined. "I was straightening up Uncle Morgan's study while I was waiting for mother to decide to go to bed and give me a chance to slip over here. It was very untidy—the study, I mean. I opened a table drawer to put some things inside, and there, staring me in the face, was this photograph. I'd never seen it before. I took it over to the light—and there he was!"

She pointed again at the figure which was interesting her so deeply.

"There's just a chance, you know," said Dr. Stafford meditatively, "that this isn't Ned at all. He might be any one of the other boys in the photograph. Your soldier friend may have been a classmate who met Ned on the other side, and who promised to look up Ned's uncle and give him news of the boy when he reached home."

Patricia considered this possibility for a moment, with pursed lips and a little frown. It was quite evident, to the doctor, that she greatly preferred the more romantic explanation.

"Of course it might be that," she said doubtfully; "but it seems hardly probable. He—he was quite interested—in me, I think," she added, with a quizzical smile and a little flush.

"That's not conclusive at all," said the doctor, laughing. "I'm interested in you, and I'm not your cousin."

"Oh, well, you know, Dr. S. O. S., that's different. You're my friend!"

She stretched out her little hand to him. The old man took it, and, leaning forward with a gesture instinct with the graciousness of an earlier day, kissed it gently. Then he straightened, squared his shoulders, and looked into her face.

"Until death, little comrade!" he said gravely. "I only wish I could do more to help you."

"But no one could do more than you are doing, dear Dr. S. O. S.," she cried. "I bring all my perplexities, big and little, to you, and you're—oh, you're such a brick about everything! I'd be lost, entirely, without you; but with you, in spite of the terrible uncertainty about poor Uncle Morgan, I'm almost happy. Driving the taxi is such fun! It's exciting and interesting, and I'm making quite a lot of money. I counted it a little while ago, and I've made four dollars and fifty cents already—and that's not counting my two steady customers, you and Mr. Turnbull. Besides, I had to stop early to-day, on account of not having the right kind of a license. Oh, I think it's going to be fine! Isn't it funny the way you feel about money you earn all yourself? I never felt the same about money before. It seems—oh, so different! So really mine, you know!"

"Oh, you're going to do a rattling good business when you get really started," said the doctor, smiling at her enthusiasm. "And we're going to make a lot on our preserves and pickles and things. I put up some strawberries this afternoon while you were out taxicabbing. Don't you want to taste 'em?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! May I?"

"You certainly may," said the doctor.

Disappearing, he presently returned with a sauce-dish of rich, transparent, luscious strawberry preserves, which he set before her with pride.

"Um, um! Never tasted anything so wonderful," murmured Patricia, with her mouth full. "How in the world can you do it, Dr. S. O. S.?"

"It's a famous old recipe of my mother's," answered the doctor, beaming. "Delectable, isn't it? I've always loved messing around a stove. Not many men like it, but it's lots of fun. I can cook almost anything. Wish I had more time, though! A little later it's going to be hard to keep up with the garden. Do you suppose we could get your Lily to help? There'll be work enough for three."

Patty was doubtful.

"I don't know, Dr. S. O. S. Lily's very good and willing, but something's come over her lately. She's as grumpy as anything, and this morning she told me she was going to leave."

"Oh, Lord!" ejaculated the doctor. "That would be a mess!"

"Wouldn't it? It would be too awful to think about. Sam would leave, too, of course, and I wouldn't know how to go about getting new servants. I can't make sure whether or not they suspect anything about Uncle Morgan. I don't believe so. Lily insists that the house is 'done hanted,' and says there's a black cat runs through the house at night with a step like a man's. Of course we know some one's been around, and she must have heard them. That's bad enough. Sam's awfully down-hearted, too. I spent nearly an hour persuading them to stay. I felt like crying, and I did. It touched Lily right away. She's very tender-hearted; and at last they promised to stay till Uncle Morgan gets back, anyway. Oh, dear, I wish we could know—"

"Now, now, dear child, don't think about that. Just live every day as it comes along, and be as nearly happy as you can. Of course, we can't altogether keep Morgan out of our minds, but we're getting along well in spite of everything, and we mustn't worry any more than we can help. You will earn a nice income from the car, and soon we'll be selling preserves and delicious home-canned vegetables. The gardens are both wonderful, thanks to our good friend Marco. He certainly was a find, that man! I'm glad you decided to let him help in your garden, too. It's too big for one pair of hands, and Marco's worth the money. I never saw an Italian work harder. He comes early and stays late. The man's a jewel."

They talked on a little longer, and then, though it was still early, the doctor thought Pat looked tired, and insisted on taking her home. It was a cloudy, windy night, threatening rain.

"The wind's in the east. It 'll probably rain all day to-morrow," he said, as they left the house. "Do the crops lots of good and be a holiday for Marco, poor chap. He certainly deserves it. He's by long odds the best man I've ever had."

In the mean time, the best man the good doctor ever had was not sleeping the sleep of the just and the weary. He was, in fact, much nearer at hand than the doctor could have imagined.

Marco had gone early to his room over the little fruit-shop of his friend, Annibale Firenzi. He had listened to the subsiding

sounds in the rest of the tiny, crowded flat, and, when nothing remained but the deep drone of heavy sleepers, he had pulled off his shoes and slipped noiselessly out into the narrow hall. The door to the covered outside staircase of the two-story building was close on his right. He unbolted and opened it softly, and as quietly closed it again. With stealthy step he descended the stair, and, pausing only to put on his shoes, hurried out into the street.

He walked swiftly northward along the aqueduct, noting, as he neared it, the light in Dr. Stafford's house. At the sound of voices issuing from the open door, he silently dropped down the steep side of the embankment and lay very still in the long grass under the hedge. The doctor and Patricia passed close by him on their way to the big house—so close, indeed, that he heard his name mentioned, and smiled craftily to himself in the darkness.

When they were quite gone, he sprang up from his hiding-place and ran. His feet made no sound on the soft turf beside the path. In a moment he had gained the shelter of the trees to the north, where he slowed down to a rapid walk. When he reached the village of Dorr's Ferry, he went down the hill by unfrequented back streets, crossed the railroad-tracks just below the station lights, and made his way out on a small pier which projected into the great river.

He stood for a moment at the end of the pier, apparently listening intently. The faint throb of a small engine could be heard coming nearer and nearer across the still, black water. With a satisfied nod of the head, Marco walked quietly back to the shore and let himself down to the sand in the dark shadow of the pier.

Presently he heard a boat slide up alongside the float at the end of the dock, and a gruff voice said:

"Not later than twelve, remember! I promised the missus. This ain't no all-night service, an' if your show keeps up later'n that I've leave ye to swim back to yer job. Now you mind what I say! I'm goin' to the movies, an' they're over by eleven. I won't wait more'n an hour!"

"Oh, I'll be back before twelve. I may be back before you are, Captain Brown," some one replied.

At the sound of this second voice, Marco nodded as if he recognized it and was well content. He peeped from the hiding-place

and saw, dimly outlined against the background of the station lights, the figures of two men crossing in that direction.

Before they had come within the radius of the lights, however, they suddenly stopped. One of the men said something to the other and pointed back in the direction of the boat they had just left. After a short colloquy, one man went on toward the station, while the other turned and came quickly back.

"All righta, boss!" said Marco in a deep, husky whisper, raising his head above the string-piece. "Come down here. Plenta comfortable an' quiet down here on sand. So—this way!"

He guided the dark figure down to his place of hiding, and the two sat close together on the sand. They talked in guarded tones and at considerable length. Their voices never rose above a whisper except once. Then Marco said aloud, in a tone of sharp remonstrance:

"Don't do it, boss! Don't do it! What's de use huntin' de troub'? Everat'ing goin' fine. You just gotta wait. No use spilla de bean for nottin'. I tella you Marco watch—Marco watch 'em all; an' when de time come—"

The other man gripped his arm, and Marco's voice died again to a low murmur of unavailing entreaty.

XV

THOUGH Patricia, regardful of a promise she had made to Dr. S. O. S., went immediately to bed, she found it difficult to sleep. The faint nocturnal noises in the house seemed more loud and insistent than ever before. The east wind, outside, rushed and swirled through the myriad leaves of the trees, rising stronger and stronger, now lulling a little, then returning with increasing gusty vigor. Then came the rain, not heavily, but with quick, angry spatters.

Pat's windows faced the east, and she was forced to jump out of bed to close them. For a moment she stood looking out into the wind-swept blackness; then she went over to the bed and threw back the blanket.

The room seemed stifling with all the driving air shut out, but there was no help for it. She would not risk the ruin of the pretty chints curtains Uncle Morgan had allowed her to get.

Uncle Morgan—where was he now? What had happened to him? She must

not think of that. She had promised Dr. S. O. S. she wouldn't. She must think of something else.

The young soldier—yes, that was something else to think about. A captain, he was. Ned Driscoll was a lieutenant when last Uncle Morgan had heard. Had he been promoted? Or was this only a friend of his, as Dr. S. O. S. had suggested. He seemed—well, awfully nice. If it should be Ned Driscoll—

At last Patricia slept, but not for long. She did not even realize that she had lost consciousness when she found herself wide awake, sitting bolt upright in bed, listening for the terrible sound which seemed even now to be ringing in her ears. There it was again—a frightful, wailing shriek!

Without an instant's hesitation Pat leaped from her bed, wrapped herself in a dressing-gown which lay across its foot, caught up her father's old automatic from the bed-head table, and rushed to the door. When she opened it, the hall was filled with a black darkness which seemed all the more dreadful for the repeated screams that rent the silence.

Pat's first thought was of her mother, though the frightful sound came from the floor above. Then everything happened with the rapidity of thought. She started noiselessly across the hall—and stopped, her heart beating violently. In the breath-taking lull between the screams she was sure that she heard a footstep in the hall below.

She crouched back against the wall and faced the stair-head, her pistol held ready. Then the scream came again; and before it had quite died away, she heard the back door in the lower hall close softly. She could not be mistaken. The sound of the latch, as the bolt shot home, was distinct in the instant's silence.

Patricia slipped along the wall to her mother's door.

"Mother!" she whispered, tapping it lightly. "Mother, are you there? Don't come out!"

"No, no, darling, I won't!" The trembling voice came through the keyhole. "What is it, Patricia? Who's making that dreadful sound?"

"It must be Lily, I think. I'm going up to see. Don't come out for anything! Keep your door locked. You'll be quite safe. Don't come out, whatever you hear, till I come back!"

Without waiting for an assurance which she knew would readily be given, the girl ran back across the hall and up the stairs. As she neared the top, she heard a slight sound on the landing above, and something swift and soft brushed her bare feet. She could not stop to see what it was, for the nerve-racking screams from the upper floor still continued with unabated violence. She dashed wildly on.

"What is it? Sam! Lily! What is it?" she cried in an intense whisper as she reached their open door.

"Aw, Miss Patty, Miss Patty, chile! What d' I tell yer? Dis house am hanted, hit am hanted fer sho'!"

Again Lily let forth a blood-curdling shriek. The room was brightly lighted, and Pat was relieved to see the woman, apparently quite unhurt, sitting up in the bed, her knees drawn up and clasped in her arms, rocking herself violently to and fro.

"Hush that noise at once, Lily," she said firmly, though her own knees were shaking. "What's the matter? Are you hurt? What is it, Sam?"

Sam, sitting on the edge of the bed, endeavoring to quiet the hysterical woman, was a grotesque sketch in black and white. Severely conscious of the scantiness of his night attire, he tried to slide his long, black legs under the bed and at the same time to assume the respectful attitude of his race and calling.

"'Scuse me, Miss Patty! 'Scuse us, won't yer please, ma'am? Was somepin turrible happen des now. Scairt Lily mos' to deaf—en no wonder, po' chile! Be quiet, Lily, gal! Warn't nuffin but a cat, a sho'-nuff cat, I tells yer."

He tried to say it with conviction, but his great black eyes were rolling.

"Cat! G' long, Sam! What yer talkin' erbout, boy? Was a hant, Miss Patty—'deed an' 'deed hit were. Hit jump right here on my bres'. Yas'm, hit sho' did. Oh-e-e-e!"

"Hush, Lily! Oh, hush! It was a real cat. It passed me on the stairs. We'll go down and find it and put it out. You mustn't make that horrible noise. You frightened us all dreadfully. Come now, quieted down—that's a good girl!"

Patricia patted her on the shoulder and soothed her for a few minutes. The woman responded slowly to the calming touch. As the quickest way of distracting her at-

tention from her fears, Patty said admiringly:

"My, what a lovely nightgown you have on, Lily! I haven't anything half so wonderful. You make me right jealous!"

"Yas'm," said Lily sadly, touching the folds of pink silk embellished with coarse lace. "Hit's awful sweet. Sam give hit to me fer a 'gement present, but I won't live t' wear hit out. You'll see! Dat was a wa'nin', en hit's come twice. Trouble—trouble comin' t' y' en me, Sambo! Yas, suh—yo' mark my words!"

"Don't, Lily! Don't, gal!" cried Sam, passing his great black hand over his shiny face. "Nebba trouble trouble twell trouble troubles you."

The woman had quieted down now, and only moaned lugubriously.

"Cheer up, Lily," said Patricia kindly. "Nothing's going to hurt you. Sam and I will see to it—won't we, Sam?"

"Yas'm," Sam responded doubtfully. "Yas'm; but I think Lily en I better be passin' along."

"Oh, no, Sam! No," said Patricia quickly. "I can't get on without you and Lily. You know I can't. You promised you'd stay till Mr. Carrington comes home."

"Dat's so—we done promus, Sam," said Lily faintly. "I ain't neber broke a promus yit. I was raise right, I tell yo' boy. When I gives my wud, I keeps hit. It don't mek no diffunce, Sam, anyhow. I done mark fer trouble, en hit 'll foller wherebber we goes. We mought as well stay where we are."

"You're a good girl, Lily—you surely are," said Patricia gratefully. "I'll see that nothing happens to you, and I won't forget how you've kept your word. Now, slip on some clothes, Sam, and come down through the house with me. If the cat's still there, we'll let it out. I have my father's pistol. There isn't any danger, really, you know."

She tried to believe what she said. There had been some one in the house, she was sure. She felt equally certain that whoever it was had made good his escape; but her heart beat violently, painfully, as she stood on the landing, waiting for Sam and looking down the dark stair, her pistol ready in her hand.

He joined her in a moment, and they went down together. She paused before her mother's door and whispered:

"Mother, can you hear me? It's all right. Lily was frightened by a cat. Sam and I are going down to let it out. It's quite all right!"

Then she hastily crossed the hall to her uncle's door, beside which was the light-switch. She pressed the button, and the light flashed up and flooded both the upper and lower halls and the stairs.

Everything was quiet. Nothing stirred inside the house, and only the rain could be heard, dashing fitfully in little spiteful gusts against the back windows.

"Come on, Sam!" said Patricia.

Taking her courage in both hands, she rapidly descended the stairs, while Sam followed in silence, like a black shadow. He glanced uneasily about the floor, but Patty had almost forgotten the cat, which was nowhere to be seen. She switched on the light in each room before she entered it and examined it carefully.

Nothing seemed amiss in the dining-room. The drawer of the sideboard, which contained a large outfit of heavy old silver, was untouched. There was no one in the kitchen, and there were no signs of any one having been there, though the door into the small hall at the back of the house was ajar, which was unusual.

"Did you or Lily leave this door open, Sam?" asked Patty sharply.

"I disremember, Miss Patty. I ain't sho'. We allus keeps hit shut, so de smell of de cookin' won't come into de house, like you tells us, but hit mought of blew open. Hit sometimes do."

"The cellar door's open, too. We'd better take a look down there." Remembering the cat, she added: "This is the way your spirit got into the house, I'm sure."

"No use mentionin' 'em, Miss Patty. No use of namin' deir names. I ain't askeard, only hit's des ez well to tek no chances yo' kin he'p."

Patricia did not believe in taking unnecessary risks, either. She switched on the light at the head of the stairs and peered about before she went down.

"There's where the cat got out, Sam," she said, after a quick survey. "See that broken pane at the top of the coal-heap? He probably came and went that way. I must have it mended, and then you'll see there'll be no more black cats in the house."

Sam would be very glad to believe that, he told her, as they quickly made their way back to the main floor.

The living-room looked just as usual to Patricia. There was not the slightest indication of anything having been disturbed. She passed through it with Sam at her heels and entered her uncle's study.

There was no switch by the door of this room. What light there was came from the one in front, and fell in a luminous rectangle on the floor. At the end of this illuminated space lay several folded slips of paper.

Suppressing a cry, Pat started forward and pulled the chain of the lamp on the desk. Instantly a green light shone on her face, tingeing it with a ghastly color. Below the shade, the big, shining desk lay revealed in a white glare. On it, carelessly tumbled about, was a small heap of papers. All the drawers had been opened and ransacked. So had those of a high-boy which stood in one corner. Even the small drawer of the table by the south window had been rifled and stood open, the contents partly spilled upon the floor.

Sam's face was a study.

"Who been messin' up we-all's house?" he muttered. "Mistah Carrin'ton gwine be mighty mad when he comes home—yas, suh! Who you reckon been throwin' things 'roun' dis way, Miss Patty?"

"I don't know. I can't even make a guess, Sam," said Patricia, trembling with cold and excitement.

She searched through the drawers swiftly, in spite of her shaking limbs. She had put them in order just the day before, and, so far as she could tell, nothing was missing. They had contained nothing that seemed to her of special value—certainly nothing to tempt an ordinary thief; no money, no securities of any kind. Who had been there? And with what object? And how had the house been entered?

"You locked all the doors and windows to-night, Sam? You're sure?" she asked.

"Yas'm. I'se sholy sho'. I done lock up de whole house, 'cepin' de back do', whilst yo' was ober to de doctor's."

Pat's heart gave a little sickening slide downward in her breast. She had locked the back door when she came in. Had there been some one in the house even then—some one lurking in the shadows and watching as she went up the stairs?

Well, the danger was over, at least for the night. All the doors and windows were safely locked. The bolt on the back door was drawn back, but the snap-lock was on.

Patricia shot the bolt home, and she and Sam ascended the stairs quietly.

"Leave all the lights on, Sam," she said, as they stopped in front of her door. "They're the greatest protection in the world. My father always said so. No one is likely to try to get into a lighted house. I'm going to leave them on full every night till—till Mr. Carrington comes home. Good night, Sam! We won't have any more trouble, you'll see."

She locked her door, slipped off her dressing-gown, and crept into bed, shivering. For a long time she lay awake, seeing, as she had seen it when she closed the door, the wide, silent, empty house, lighted in every room, as if for some joyous festival.

XVI

IN her night's search for traces of an unknown marauder, Patricia, with unusual foresight and acumen in one of her years and training, had taken pains to disturb things as little as possible. Early the next morning, when she and Dr. Stafford entered the study, it wore practically the same appearance as it had when she turned on the green-shaded light the night before, except that now the gray light of a cloudy day fell wanly across its disorder.

"Plainly, whoever it was, was looking for some definite thing," said the doctor after a long and careful survey. "He didn't know where to find it, either—that's clear."

Pat had followed the doctor's quick movements with deep interest and anxiety. She had come to place so much dependence on the old man that she expected every moment he would unearth some clue which had escaped her on the previous night.

She noted, too, that he was as careful as she had been not to alter the appearance of the room. If he lifted a book or paper, he put it back exactly as it had been. When he pulled a drawer farther open to examine its contents, he pushed it back to its original position.

He was examining in this way the drawer of the table which stood in the south window, when a short ejaculation escaped him.

"What is it, Dr. S. O. S.?"

Patricia was standing close beside him. Now she leaned farther forward to see what had attracted his attention.

"See there, Pat! What do you suppose that means?" he asked, pointing to a few grains of gray and black ash which lay

partly on a paper and partly on the bottom of the drawer, close in the corner. "Looks as if the man who was here was a smoker, and that he was so lacking in caution as to be smoking at the time. Rather a strange thing to do, unless he was very sure that he wouldn't be interrupted, and that no one in the house was awake to smell the smoke. Queer kind of ash, too. Some of the tobacco is only charred, as if—"

"Oh, I know what that is," cried Pat. "That isn't any clue at all, Dr. S. O. S. I can explain that myself. I put an old pipe of Uncle Morgan's in there yesterday, and the ash must have fallen from it. It couldn't have been quite empty, you see." "Pipe ash!" said the doctor, looking at it again. "Yes, that's just what it is, of course; but the pipe—why, Pat, there's no pipe here!"

Patricia, too, looked into the drawer as the doctor pulled it farther out. There certainly was no pipe there.

"But I put it in there, yesterday, Dr. S. O. S., I'm sure. It was here that I found the photograph I showed you, and I found it when I opened the drawer to put the pipe away. The pipe had been lying on the mantelpiece, and every time I saw it, it brought Uncle Morgan right before me. He smoked it so much, and I couldn't bear to have it there to remind me."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor hurriedly; "but it isn't here now, that's clear. You don't suppose that Sam—"

"No, I'm sure Sam doesn't smoke a pipe—at least, I've never seen him."

"And he wouldn't be likely to take your uncle's pipe, anyway. You'd be sure to recognize it if you ever saw it."

"Sam's honest, too," Pat interrupted. "At least, he'd never take anything of ours, I'm certain. Lily would come down on him like a thousand of brick if he did. She said last night that she was 'raised right,' and she's proving it by keeping her word to stay, in spite of her terror of 'hants.' No, it couldn't have been Sam."

"Then we have one little, slender clue, Pat—the man is a pipe-smoker. I think that's a perfectly safe deduction, though I admit it doesn't lead us very far," said the doctor ruefully.

The silence which fell between them was broken by the sound of a soft footfall on the stair. Before either of them could move to close the door, Mrs. Carrington, in an elaborate negligée, appeared in the liv-

ing-room, and, catching sight of Patricia, came quickly toward the study.

"Patricia, dear," she said plaintively, "the coffee Lily sent up to me wasn't fit to drink! It was too awful for words. I had to get up to tell you about it. Will you see that she makes me a fresh cup, and that—"

She caught sight of Dr. Stafford, and at the same moment became conscious of the untidiness of the study.

"Why—why—oh, Dr. Stafford!" She drew her lavender silk kimono closer about her. "I didn't know that any one was here! But why is everything upset in here? Morgan will be very angry. Why—"

She broke off suddenly and looked keenly from Patricia to the doctor.

"Why don't you say something, Patricia?" she exclaimed, beginning to be alarmed. "What is it? Has something happened? That noise in the night—you said Lily was frightened by a cat. Oh, it wasn't—it couldn't have been—burglars?" she wailed.

"Hush, mother, please," said Pat, passing quickly behind her and closing the door. "Nothing has been taken, as far as we can discover."

"Then it was a horrid burglar, Patricia! Oh, how dreadful! And Morgan stopping away all this time! He ought to be here. We must let him know at once. Have you telegraphed him? Dr. Stafford, you must let him know immediately! His business can't be so important!"

She caught the glance which passed between the doctor and Patty.

"Oh!" she cried. "You are keeping me in the dark! You both know something that you haven't told me! What is it? Where is Morgan, Dr. Stafford, and why don't you send for him?" Suddenly she turned to her daughter. "Answer me, Patricia!" she said peremptorily. "I will be answered. We must send for your uncle. Where is he?"

"Better tell her, Pat," said the doctor quietly. "We can't hope—"

"Mother," said Patricia, "you must not be alarmed. We fully believe that Uncle Morgan is all right, but we do not know where he is."

Mrs. Carrington sank into a chair. Her head dropped back, and she closed her eyes.

"You can't mean it!" she said faintly. "Morgan gone—and without a word to me! It isn't possible! Dr. Stafford, you said—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the doctor hastily. "I shouldn't have done it—I can see that now; but we hoped that he would be back long before this, and that he would explain everything. I thought there was no need to worry you. It was my idea. Pat isn't at all to blame."

"I agreed with Dr. Stafford, mother," said Patricia quickly. "I'm as much to blame as he; but we only did it to spare you. You must see that. There was nothing to be done."

"Nothing, Patricia? You've done nothing? And perhaps poor Morgan has been—ugh!" She shuddered. "He may have been done away with, or have met with some horrible accident. Oh, you should have told me!"

The doctor assured her that they had done everything that was humanly possible; that they felt certain, from the hospital reports, that Carrington could not have met with an accident; that they had refrained from appealing to the police by advice of counsel.

"But I'm not sure now," added the doctor, looking about him—"I'm not sure now, Pat, that we ought not to get an experienced detective on the case. This attempt at burglary—which may, for all we know, have been successful—"

"You mean that the thief may have found what he was after without our realizing that anything was missing?" said Patty eagerly.

"Yes, I mean just that. We could neither of us know what may have been the significance of a given paper, we'll say—something that would have had no apparent value."

"I see," said Patricia slowly. "That does put a different face on the whole matter, doesn't it, Dr. S. O. S.?"

"Yes, I think it does," said the doctor; "and I believe that we ought to communicate with Thornton again. Franklin Thornton was Morgan's lawyer," he explained to Mrs. Carrington, "and an old friend both to him and to me. It was on his advice—"

"Oh, go to see him at once, Dr. Stafford!" said the little lady, clasping her plump hands in an appealing gesture. "I'm sure we ought to have some one with brains to ferret out this dreadful mystery! Won't you go to see him?"

"I'll do better than that," said the doctor promptly. "I'll get him on the tele-

phone. He may not be in his office, since it's Saturday, but I'll find out where he is. We can trust his advice, Pat"—he turned to the girl—"and he'll know a good man to put on the case, I hope, though Thornton isn't a criminal lawyer."

During the subsequent telephone conversation, Mrs. Carrington, recovering rapidly from the severe shock to the delicate nerves of which she so often boasted, became more and more acutely aware of her dishabille. She was conscious that her face, which ordinarily had the appearance of an elaborately retouched and colored photograph, must look wan and gray in the cold morning light; and presently, with a murmured word to Patricia, she withdrew.

The girl had been listening eagerly to the doctor's questions and answers, and had gathered that Thornton's advice, in view of last night's developments, was to put an experienced private detective on the case at once. There was some delay while the lawyer looked up addresses. When the doctor finally called the detective bureau, it appeared that the man whom Thornton's confidential clerk had recommended was away on a case, and wasn't expected back for several days.

"They say that the man they're sending—Powell, his name is—is just as experienced a man as the other," said the doctor to Pat as he hung up the receiver. "We shall have to hope for the best. We can't wait."

"No," said Patricia. "I feel as if I couldn't bear another moment of inaction. When will this Mr. Powell be here?"

"He's leaving on the next train. We'd better look it up and meet him at the station, don't you think?"

"Oh, yes!" said Pat, and then, struck with a sudden thought aroused by the mention of trains, she clasped her hands together in distress. "Do you know what I've done, Dr. S. O. S.? I've clean forgotten Mr. Turnbull! What do you suppose he'll think of me? He will have missed his train, and—oh, dear!"

"He isn't the first man that's been disappointed by a taxi-driver, Pat. Don't let it worry you, little girl. Meet him this afternoon and apologize nicely, and I'm sure he won't have the heart to be angry with you. Now, let me see—have you a time-table here?"

"Oh, yes," said Pat, producing one from her pocket, her mind quickly reverting to

the more absorbing subject. "We must be sure to meet the detective. I'll get the car out at once."

The doctor sympathized heartily with her desire to be immediately up and doing, but after examining the time-table he pointed out that Powell could not by any possibility reach Stonehill for an hour and a half. Partly from a sense of duty, and partly from a desire to give Pat something else to think about, he suggested that they should occupy the time by running over to Harford and making the round of his patients.

The girl assented eagerly. They closed and locked the study door, and, while the doctor went over to get his medicine-case, she ran up-stairs and explained matters briefly to her mother. Mrs. Carrington, absorbed in the mysteries of her toilet, agreed absently that Patricia would no doubt be better for a little fresh air, and, upon the assurance that she would not be late in meeting the detective, she was allowed to depart.

It happened, therefore, that when, somewhat later in the morning, a well-set-up young officer knocked at Morgan Carrington's front door, Mrs. Carrington was the only person in the house to receive him.

In spite of her crushing anxieties, she felt that she had achieved a very satisfactory toilet, and it was with a comforting sense of looking the part of the patrician chateleine that she descended the stairs and met the stranger in the hall.

He was standing just inside the door, his cap in his hand.

"I'm very sorry to trouble you," he said, advancing toward her; "but I'm anxious to see Mr. Carrington. Your man says that he isn't here, and I hoped you could tell me when he's expected back, or where he could be found in town."

The question unnerved Mrs. Carrington. She was at a loss how to reply. Patricia and the doctor had both impressed upon her rather shallow mind that it was important to keep Morgan's disappearance a secret. The reason was not so clear to her, but they had made a great point of it.

To gain time for consideration, she said graciously:

"Won't you come in and rest? You must have walked up from the station, and those dreadful hills are so fearfully tiring!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Carrington," the young man said, smiling, and followed her into the living-room.

It did not strike her as at all unusual that he should know her name at once. If she had thought anything about it, she would have supposed that he had learned it from the butler.

"You're a soldier, aren't you?" she remarked unnecessarily; "and you've been fighting for us all, over there in France! I can tell by your service stripes. Oh, it's wonderful, wonderful, to think of the way in which all you dear boys responded to the call to arms! Your mother must be very proud of her son!"

"My mother, Mrs. Carrington," he said slowly, "is dead. She died long ago. So did my father. I've been on my own, except for a guardian, since I was a little shaver. You see I was obviously the sort of chap to go into the army, with no one to worry much about me at home."

He smiled a little sadly.

"Oh, you poor boy!" cried Mrs. Carrington sweetly. "You've just come home—and no one to welcome you! Oh, it's too sad!"

"I didn't expect any one to meet me. I came sooner than I had hoped, so you see I wasn't exactly disappointed." He was regarding her keenly but covertly all the while. "Mr. Carrington will be at home soon, do you think?" he added smoothly.

The question was put directly and required a definite answer. Under the straight glance of the clear brown eyes, Mrs. Carrington shifted uneasily in her chair and coughed discreetly behind her tiny handkerchief. The young man waited in silence.

"Why," said Mrs. Carrington hesitatingly, after a pause which she could no longer prolong, "why, really, I don't know just when Mr. Carrington will be back. I can hardly say."

Her manner was distinctly troubled. The soldier leaned forward in his chair.

"I've come a long way to see Mr. Carrington," he said. "I called here yesterday. Did they tell you?"

The surprise in her face was genuine—of that he was sure.

"Why, no," she said. "No one told me; but then I'm told nothing," she added plaintively.

The young man rapidly reviewed the circumstances which had presented themselves to his notice and added to them this last. The girl who had taken him up in her car—the girl who had answered so promptly to

the name of "Patty"—had not spoken to her mother of having seen him. Nothing strange in that, perhaps; but added to the fact that a girl of her evident social training was driving a taxicab, it seemed significant. Was the cab business unknown to her mother? Was that the secret?

Driving a cab might have been a youthful prank, and the girl might have been afraid of admitting to him that she was sufficiently acquainted with Morgan Carrington to know his plans. If that were the case, why should Mrs. Carrington be so reticent and appear so uneasy?

These reflections passed so quickly through his mind that there was scarcely a perceptible pause in the conversation.

"It doesn't matter in the least," he said, referring to the fact that she had not been told of his previous appearance; "but I should be very glad to get in touch with Mr. Carrington. Is he in New York, by any chance?"

Mrs. Carrington raised her hands and let them fall with a hopeless gesture. Tears of mingled annoyance and nervousness stood in her eyes.

"I really don't know where he is," she admitted sadly.

It was no use. She positively could not think of anything else to say to this persistent young man. Why didn't the doctor and Patricia come back and rescue her?

"You don't know where he is?" repeated the soldier wonderingly. "Surely you can't mean, Mrs. Carrington—pardon me, but that sounded as if you were troubled in some way about Mr. Carrington's absence. It isn't possible—"

"Oh, I think everything dreadful is possible in this horrid world! Nothing is too bad to be true," she said despairingly. "Everything has been so disappointing ever since we came North; and now Morgan—Mr. Carrington, I mean—gone! Gone off without a word to me—to any of us!" Completely unnerved, the poor, weak little woman buried her face in her handkerchief. "He's disappeared," she wailed softly. "He went away from the house on Monday morning, nearly a whole week ago, and we haven't heard a word from him since!"

The young man drew in his breath sharply.

"Disappeared! A man like—like Mr. Carrington! Why, it isn't possible!"

"But it's true, nevertheless. They tried

to keep it from me. I only found out this morning—and I'm so anxious and worried! I'm really not myself at all."

"No, no. No—of course not," said the soldier.

All the while he was thinking hard.

"Mrs. Carrington," he went on, after a pause in which her sobs partially subsided, "I hardly know what to say." He hesitated, and then went on as if his mind were finally made up. "I don't know how I could be of service to you, but I'd be glad to help you in any way that I could. My name"—if he hesitated again, Louise Carrington was too agitated to observe it—"my name is John Garrison. I was with your nephew, Ned Driscoll, in France. We were together on the Rhine, and when I was sent home sooner than I expected, he asked me to look Mr. Carrington up. He's very fond of his uncle, you know. Ned and I are very"—the slight pause was undoubtedly due to a masculine diffidence in expressing an emotion—"very close friends. We were in the same class at Harvard, and we've seen service together. I may say that Ned saved my life more than once. He won't be back for a couple of months, in all probability—perhaps more. Could you let me take his place, as it were? I'd do—well, a good deal for Ned. If there was any way that I could be of service to his people."

"It's very good of you, Mr."—glancing at his shoulder-straps, Mrs. Carrington hastily corrected herself—"Captain Garrison. I don't know what you could do, and I shouldn't have spoken of Mr. Carrington's having disappeared. I must beg you not to let it go any further."

"You may be quite sure about that," said Garrison quietly.

At that moment they heard a motor-car coming swiftly up the drive. It stopped before the door. There was a mingled hum of voices. A light foot ran rapidly up the steps, across the porch, and through the hall, and Patricia Carrington appeared in the doorway.

XVII

"MOTHER!" said Patricia—and stopped short, perceiving that her mother was not alone.

John Garrison rose quickly to his feet, and, turning, met her eyes. The girl was startled at seeing him—that was evident. She held his gaze for a swift second, then

turned a troubled, inquiring glance at her mother.

"This is Captain Garrison, a friend of Ned Driscoll's," said Mrs. Carrington, presenting him. "My daughter, Captain Garrison."

The young man bowed.

"I'm very glad to meet you, Captain Garrison," said Patricia gravely. "Please sit down. I must speak to my mother. You'll excuse her a moment, I know."

She drew Mrs. Carrington out into the hall as Dr. Stafford and a strange man entered the front door.

"Will you let me present Mr. Powell, mother?" said Patricia in a low voice.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, ma'am," said the detective in his best society manner.

He was a tall, over-fed, over-dressed person, with slightly protruding, colorless eyes and a humorous but rather predatory nose and mouth.

"We'll make short work of this little affair," he went on in a loud, assured voice. "Disappearance, eh, and attempted burglary? Nice little job—eh, what?"

Patricia raised a warning hand and motioned with her head toward the living-room. The detective was quicker to take a hint than one would have imagined from his appearance. He raised his eyebrows questioningly, nodded his comprehension that the room was occupied, and slapped himself playfully on the wrist.

"If Mr. Powell wants to see the study at once, we'll have to go through the living-room," said Patricia; "and there's some one there."

"Who is it?" asked Dr. Stafford in a guarded tone.

"A Captain Garrison," answered Patricia. "He's just back from France—says he's a friend of Ned Driscoll's."

She met the doctor's eye and held it.

"Same man?"

Stafford's lips formed the words in an almost soundless aside. Pat nodded.

"H-m!" The doctor drew in a quick breath. "Well, there's no harm in our passing through the room." After a second's consideration he went on quickly: "It won't be necessary to present us or to explain. Come into the study as soon as you can, Pat. Now, if you please, Mr. Powell!"

The doctor led the way through the back of the long living-room and unlocked the

study door. Powell followed him, and the two men disappeared.

A little later Patricia joined them. She found the detective with his coat off, hard at work. Dr. Stafford stood by, looking on with eager interest.

"Have you found anything?" she asked swiftly.

"Not anything that I can make head or tail of," answered the doctor. "I've told Mr. Powell everything we know, and he seems to think—"

"We won't jump to conclusions, miss," interrupted the detective. "We'll leave that to amachewers;" and he glanced tolerantly at the doctor. "There ain't an awful lot here to go on, but offhand I should say the chances were that your uncle had got himself mixed up with some secret society, and that whoever came in here last night was looking for some secret papers that Mr. Carrington had got hold of. He may have found 'em, for all we can tell. I'd make a guess that the society, whatever it is, wasn't altogether crazy about the way your uncle was carrying things on, and maybe he vamosed to avoid trouble. His taking all that money away with him looks bad. Might have been afraid they'd get hold of it. No, that cat won't fight. How could they hope to get it out of the bank?" He scratched his bald head. "I can't make that fit in exactly, unless they thought he might have doubled back and hidden it here before he dropped out of sight. The doctor, here, doesn't think he could possibly have done that; but you never can tell."

He paused and appeared lost in the contemplation of possibilities. At last he raised his head.

"You leave it to me, miss," he added confidently. "You leave it to little Willy. I've cracked harder nuts than this, you can bet your life! You and the doctor run along now and let me think."

"It's one o'clock, Mr. Powell, and lunch is just going on the table. Won't you have something to eat?" said Patricia, mindful of her duties as hostess. "I could send you in a tray, if you want to go on with your work."

"That's just the very ticket, thank you, miss—send me in a bite. I'd like to take a peek at your butler, anyway. Send him along when you're ready. No hurry!"

When they had closed the study door, Pat touched the doctor's arm to detain him.

The living-room was empty, but voices could be heard coming from the far end of the porch.

"He's staying to lunch, Dr. S. O. S., this soldier who calls himself Captain Garrison," she said, just above her breath. "Mother asked him—she's so fearfully hospitable—and he accepted. You must stay, too. I want you to see what you think of him. He seems awfully nice and pleasant and kind. I found out that mother's let the cat out of the bag about Uncle Morgan. He knows now why I couldn't tell him when Uncle Morgan would be back, but evidently he hasn't let mother suspect that he had ever seen me before this morning."

"Must be quick in the uptake, as my old Scottish nurse used to say," said Dr. Stafford musingly. "I only had a glimpse of him, but he looked like a boy who could keep his own counsel. I don't think there's much harm in his knowing that Morgan has disappeared, especially as he's a friend of Ned's."

"But are we sure that he is?" said Patricia, shaking her head, with an excited gleam of perplexity tinged with amusement in her eyes. "Is his name really John Garrison?"

"Must be," said the doctor promptly. "If it were Ned, as you suspected at first, he'd have been sure to say so when he learned of the trouble you and your mother are in."

"I thought that, too, at first," said Pat doubtfully. "I can't see now what object he could possibly have in deceiving us; but, Dr. S. O. S."—she leaned toward him, and her voice sank to a whisper—"whatever his name is, I'm quite sure that it isn't Garrison."

"Why, my dear child!" exclaimed the doctor, startled. "What reason can you have for saying that?"

"When I slipped up-stairs to wash my hands a few minutes ago," she replied a trifle breathlessly, "I took another look at that photograph of the Harvard crew. I had it in my room, and I wanted to make sure that I couldn't have been mistaken in the man. I wasn't. It's the same face—I'm sure of that."

"Well—" began the doctor.

"Yes, I know—they might both have been on the crew, as you said. That's true; but listen to this. I happened to turn the picture over, and there—I don't know why

we didn't notice it before, except that the back of the photograph was gray and the writing was in blue pencil and hardly showed—"

"Yes?" said the doctor eagerly.

"Well, there was a list of names on the back. I counted them, and the number corresponded to the number of boys in the crew. Ned's name was there—his last name, at least, for they were all just the last names; but there was no Garrison there."

The doctor whistled softly.

"Now what do you think?" asked Pat, with a little flash of triumph.

"Dear me, I don't know what to think," said the doctor. "Why should Ned come here incognito? What possible object could he have?"

"I can't imagine," said Patricia excitedly; "but it would be rather fun, wouldn't it? He knows that none of us have ever seen him. Oh, if it weren't for poor Uncle Morgan, I think it would be a great lark! Of course we mustn't let the captain imagine that we have guessed who he is. That would spoil it all!"

"Lunch's se'ved, Miss Patty," said Sam solemnly, from the doorway.

"All right, Sam. Tell mother, please," said Patricia. "When you go into the kitchen, tell Lily to put some lunch on a tray, and you take it in to the man you'll find in Mr. Carrington's study."

The darky rolled his great eyes as who should say "What next?" and returned to his duties.

It was a pleasant luncheon, all things considered. Dr. Stafford, in his quiet, friendly way, took pains to draw the young soldier out, and John Garrison responded with apparent frankness. The doctor, as was natural, questioned him about his service in France, and noted, without comment, that Garrison had been in all the important actions in which he knew, from Morgan Carrington, that Ned Driscoll had participated. There was nothing strange in this, perhaps, since Garrison had stated that he and Ned had been together almost from the very first.

"Well," said the doctor, "you certainly have been through a great deal, Captain Garrison, and you must be glad to be home once more. You'll be leaving the service soon now, I suppose?"

"Yes, thank Heaven," answered Garrison. "I get my discharge on Monday, and

I'll have to be looking about for something to do."

"Have you any plans yet?" asked the doctor, with polite interest.

"No, not yet. I'm rather at loose ends. I haven't even a home to go to. I'll have to find a place to live, first of all, and it's going to be a little difficult. I hate New York in the summer-time. I'd much rather be out of town; but I have no idea, at present, where to go."

He spoke slowly—tentatively, the doctor thought.

Through the whole meal Mrs. Carrington had been, for her, unusually silent. Now she broke into the conversation with her customary irrelevance.

"I wonder, Captain Garrison, if you are by any chance related to the New York Garrisons whom I used to know when I was a girl?"

"It's not a very uncommon name," said the young man, smiling a trifle uneasily. "There are a great many Garrisons in New York, I believe."

"The Jane Garrison I knew," said Mrs. Carrington, "belonged to a very rich and very old New York family. I met her at White Sulphur Springs. She was very beautiful, I remember, and extremely popular. She made an unfortunate match, though—that is, in one way. Randolph Peyton's family was quite as good as hers, but he had very little money. I heard that they settled at his home in Virginia, and that they were very happy. She was a lovely girl. Was she a connection of yours, do you know, Captain Garrison?"

"I've heard of Mrs. Peyton," said the young soldier slowly. "I think she is a connection of the family."

Mrs. Carrington beamed. She had an instinct for discovering the social advantages of those with whom she came in contact, and was never quite satisfied until she had placed an acquaintance against a definite background. If this young man was one of the New York Garrisons, his character, in her eyes, was most effectively set off by the known wealth and position of the ancestry behind him.

"That's very interesting—very interesting indeed!" she said brightly. "I remember how—"

She rambled off into a long series of unimportant incidents connected with the social triumphs of her girlhood.

Garrison listened with flattering atten-

tion, though his eyes roved often to Patricia's face. The girl's quiet manner, her sincere, steadfast eyes, her gracious friendship with the old physician, all struck him as being beautiful and appealing to the last degree.

He wondered what freak—what necessity, perhaps—had induced her to take up the incongruous profession of a public chauffeur. Had it anything to do with her uncle's strange and unaccountable absence? The whole situation was vastly intriguing.

He had an instinctive feeling that Mrs. Carrington knew nothing of the taxicab business. When luncheon was finished, and they all strolled out on the porch, he was not very much surprised at Miss Carrington's taking advantage of the first opportunity of speaking to him alone.

The doctor had detained Mrs. Carrington for a moment just inside the front door, and Patricia and the young man had moved on down to the south end of the porch—where, she said, they could get a better view of the Palisades and the river.

"You'll think it very odd, Captain Garrison," she began hurriedly, in a low voice, "but I'm going to ask you please, please not to let my mother know about—"

"The taxi stuff," he said, smiling amusedly as she hesitated. "I guessed that she wasn't very well acquainted with you in your professional capacity. I guessed it right away. I haven't said anything to make her suspect, and I won't—" with a shake of the head. "You can depend on me. Does the doctor know?"

"Yes," nodded Patricia. "I don't think he altogether approves, poor dear, but he's been perfectly darling about it. My heart was set on it, and of course he realizes the necessity—"

She stopped with the sentence unfinished.

"Of what? Do tell me, Miss Carrington! I'd like—I'd like awfully to—to help you, if I could. I haven't much to recommend me. I'm not much of a chap, and you don't know me yet at all; but I am—well, you could trust me in this. I'd never abuse your confidence. I can see that you're in some kind of a tight place. It must worry you terribly, your uncle's having gone off so strangely. It worries me, too—on Ned's account, you know," he added hastily. "I feel as if I ought to try to do whatever he would do if he were here. Can't you trust me? Won't you let me help you?"

Patricia looked at him a little oddly. Everything that he had said—his hesitation when asked about the Garrison family—his concern about her uncle's disappearance—his desire to be of service to her and to her mother—all pointed one way. To be sure, his hair and eyes were lighter than those of the Carringtons, and he bore no family resemblance to them—took after his father, possibly.

If he was Ned Driscoll, why didn't he say so? It was very strange; but then so many strange things had happened. Somehow Patricia felt certain that this really was her cousin, and that for some reason best known to himself he wanted them all to remain in the dark.

Possibly he had already found out that his fortune had vanished with the disappearance of Morgan Carrington. Possibly he might suspect—could he suspect that they—that she—had benefited in any way? The improbable idea was too dreadful. It decided her all in a moment, and she said:

"I really don't see how you can help us. We've employed a detective, and we're doing everything we can think of to clear things up. Dr. Stafford has been wonderfully kind. There are a lot of things that are hard to explain. That must seem very odd to a stranger."

She glanced up at him sharply, but his eyes betrayed only a serious, eager interest, and she went on.

"But I think—I think I would like you to know that I'm not running Uncle Morgan's—Mr. Carrington's car as a taxi just for fun. I—I need the money. We must have something to live on, and it's the only thing I know how to do."

"So that's it!" Garrison's face showed wonder and surprise tinged with a very genuine admiration. "You didn't waste any time taking the situation in hand, did you? But do you mean to say that Mr. Carrington left you absolutely without funds? Good Lord, what a rotten position for a girl to be in! I wish—oh, I wish there was something I could do! Can't you think of some way for me to be of service? I'd do anything!"

"It is a lovely view, isn't it?" Mrs. Carrington's soft voice almost made him jump. "I didn't altogether like it at first—those great rocks across the river looked so hard and stony, but I'm getting used to it, and the sunsets are really quite delightful. You must see some of our sunsets,

Captain Garrison." She spoke as if they were arranged and exhibited for the exclusive benefit of herself and her guests. "You must come out often," she went on with Southern cordiality. "Any of Ned Driscoll's friends, especially men who have risked their lives in the service of their country, are most welcome in our house. You must make our house your home, remember, and come whenever you can!"

"Don't say that unless you mean it, Mrs. Carrington," the young soldier replied, laughing. "You'll find me camping on your door-step, if you aren't careful. It isn't safe to give that sort of invitation to a homeless wanderer like myself!"

"Oh, but I do mean it!" cried Mrs. Carrington. "Come as often and stay as long as you please. You dear boys are always most welcome."

"May I come again? Please let me," said the young man quietly to Patricia a few moments later, as he took her hand in his at parting. "I want to, dreadfully; but I won't come without your permission."

His eagerness only strengthened Pat's assurance that she was in reality talking to her cousin.

"You must make this house your home, as mother said," she answered, with a little, quizzical look in her eyes, the cause of which Captain Garrison was at a loss to determine.

XVIII

"WHAT are you doing at this time of night, Dr. S. O. S.?"

The old man, in his shirt-sleeves, his clothing protected by a long white apron, turned with a smile as Patricia came through his kitchen door.

"Hello, Pat, little comrade! Did you get a good rest?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed—I slept for two hours; but you haven't been resting, doctor dear, have you? You don't mean to tell me you've done all of that this evening?" She pointed to a long row of small jars, the last of which he was now filling with luscious, ruby-colored preserves. "Why didn't you ask me to help you? I had no idea—"

"No, my dear, I didn't tell you that Marco picked strawberries in your garden all the morning. They had to be put up right away, and I knew you would insist on helping; so I kept it a dark and crimson secret."

"Oh, it's too bad, Dr. S. O. S.!"

"No, no—it's almost too good. Taste it, if you don't believe me."

He gave her a spoon and the nearly empty white enamel kettle.

"Simply my idea of heaven!" Pat announced solemnly. "But you shouldn't have done it, Dr. S. O. S. You shouldn't work yourself to death to let a lazy girl sleep. If you go on like this, I shall be nothing but a sleeping partner—couldn't call me a silent partner, exactly. You really should have told me that there was all of this to do."

"Oh, it wasn't hard to manage," said the doctor. "The firm couldn't afford to waste all this good material, you know. We're going to make a comfortable penny before the season's over, you and I together, Pat. Besides, I hadn't a bad night last night, as you had. You needed the rest. What was that?"

They both started as a soft knock sounded on the kitchen door. The doctor opened it at once.

"Miss Patty yere, doctor? Yes, suh, I sees her. Miss Patty, chile, Sam en I gwine out fer de evenin', efn y' don't mine." Lily's manner was subdued and mournful. "We-all's havin' a big holiness week at de Ebenezer Chapel in Yonkers, en hit 'll be good fer our souls."

"What's the matter, Lily?" asked the doctor kindly. "You seem sort of sad. Aren't you feeling well?"

"Naw, suh, I ain't feelin' right well, en dat's de troof. I ain't been feelin' scrumptious for a long time. My stomach's powerful weak, doctor. I felt so bad all day, I got mysef some po'k chops en green peppers fer my dinner, en I couldn't eat but two chops. Naw, suh, I done mek dat lovely lobster bluebird, what Mis' Carrington ordered, fer lunch, en 'twas all I could do to touch it. Des ate one er two plate-fuls, en dat was all. 'Tek hit away, Sam,' I sez. 'No use wastin' dem riches ob de worl' on dem ez ain't long fer dis yearth!'"

"Oh, cheer up, Lily! You'll be all right soon," said the doctor. "I don't think your symptoms are really alarming."

The girl muttered something about "hants not bodderin' white folkses," and, having received permission from her young mistress, took herself sadly away.

"What she says about 'hants' is all nonsense, of course," said the doctor, as he closed the door after her; "but, Pat, I don't like your being so unprotected over

there. Won't you let me come over to sleep? I'm old, and not much use if anything should happen, but—"

"You're not a bit old, Dr. S. O. S., and you're a whole lot of use," said Pat indignantly; "but we'll get along all right. Mother is quite satisfied by what Mr. Powell told her, and it would only arouse her fears again. He seemed confident that we sha'n't have any more nocturnal visitors, especially if we keep the lower floor lighted. He thought that was a very good idea of mine."

"Just the same, I wish you had a real man in the house," said the doctor anxiously. "Powell seemed very certain, but—"

"What did you think of Mr. Powell, Dr. S. O. S.? Were you satisfied with the way he took hold of things?"

"Well," said the doctor slowly, "he was thorough, so far as I could see, and his not finding anything to the purpose was to be expected, I suppose. I'm afraid that these detectives who can trace a criminal from an eyelash are only to be found in fiction. He agreed with Franklin Thornton that the records of cases of disappearance were all in favor of the theory that Morgan is still alive and well. We'll hope so, anyway, and try to possess our souls in patience."

But the days of "watchful waiting" which followed were hard on all of them. Mrs. Carrington mourned, like a dove, more or less continuously. She only cheered up when John Garrison appeared at the house, as he did with satisfactory frequency. He talked to her a great deal, though his eyes followed Patty whenever they could do so unobserved.

Nearly a week had passed, and Garrison had been twice to Stonehill, when, one afternoon, Pat, with a high color in her cheeks, ran into the doctor's garden.

The old man was hard at work making rings of cut-worm food around some young tomato-plants.

"Oh, Dr. S. O. S.!" she cried. "I've found the reason. I'm sure I've found the reason!"

"Reason? Reason for what, Pat?" he asked, rising to his feet and coming toward her. "There's reason in all things—but I don't suppose you mean that. What is it, child?"

She glanced at Marco's back, which was turned toward them as he busily weeded a long row of beets.

"Come into the house a minute," she

said, beckoning to the doctor. "I want to show you something."

"Start on the onions, Marco, when you get through with that," said Dr. Stafford. "I'll be back in a little while."

But Marco must have been very tired. As soon as the doctor and Patricia had entered the house, he left the garden by the back path, made his way unostentatiously around the house, lay down in the shade close to the wall under the living-room windows, and apparently fell fast asleep.

"Now, Pat," said the doctor eagerly, "let's have it!"

He motioned the girl to a chair and sat down close beside her.

"Well, you see, doctor, it was like this. I was putting poor Uncle Morgan's woolen clothes away in camphor. There have been a lot of moths flying about, and I didn't dare to leave them hanging in the closet any longer." Pat's voice was tense with excitement.

"Yes, yes—go on," said the doctor quickly.

"I felt in all the pockets, of course. You never can tell what a man may leave in his pockets. I found soiled handkerchiefs—change—cough-drops—all sorts of things, and, among them, this letter."

She held out to the doctor a torn envelope with a bulky enclosure. He took it quickly and looked at the address.

Mr. Morgan Carrington, 893 Broad Road, Stonehill, N. Y., U. S. A.

The handwriting was firm, direct, and masculine. In the upper left-hand corner were written the words, "Officer's mail."

"From Ned Driscoll, of course," said the doctor, with raised eyebrows.

"Yes," said Pat hastily. "Now turn it over."

The old man did so, and found that a considerable portion of the envelope had been torn away by the impatient hand which had opened it—had presumably opened it quite recently, just before this dark cloud had fallen on the house of Carrington. Where was that hand now, and what was it doing while the old doctor looked at its characteristic work?

"I didn't take the letter out," said Pat, breaking into the doctor's thoughts; "but I saw my name, and I couldn't help reading those few lines. All in a flash it came to me—but read it, Dr. S. O. S. I'm sure Uncle Morgan wouldn't mind."

Thus urged, Stafford bent his head, adjusted his glasses, and read:

can I agree with your wishes in
my cousin Patricia, without ever
eyes on her?

That was all. The doctor raised his head quickly and met Pat's dancing eyes.

"Don't you see, Dr. S. O. S.? Don't you see it all?" she cried. "Uncle Morgan must have taken it into his head that Ned Driscoll and I—that—we're only sort of half-cousins, you know. He must have felt that it would be a good idea—oh, don't you see what I mean?"

"By George!" the doctor said, grinning. "The old match-maker! I wouldn't have suspected it of him, and yet—well, I know how sincerely he wanted to provide for you. He may have felt that this would be the best way for you both, and—"

"And when Ned came home, and found Uncle Morgan wasn't here," Pat impetuously interrupted, "he thought he'd just look things over without letting any one know who he was. It's like a fairy tale, isn't it, Dr. S. O. S.? Oh, I think it's so amusing and romantic!"

"By Jove, that would be a lark, wouldn't it?" said the doctor, who knew how such an adventure would have appealed to him when he was at Ned Driscoll's age.

"We'll just go on pretending that we don't know," said Pat breathlessly. "I wouldn't for the world have him suspect. And when he comes out again—you know, Dr. S. O. S.," she broke off, "he's been sounding mother on the possibility of his coming out here to board somewhere until he can find a place. Since it's surely Ned, wouldn't it be the best thing, in all the circumstances, to have him board with us? It's really his house, you know, in a way; but I think it would be right for him to pay for his food, and it would be a help. I'm not making nearly so much with the car as I had hoped. You see, while there are bunches of people on all the afternoon trains, I can only take one or two from each, and there are only about four or five trains that I can possibly meet. I have only my one steady customer besides you, and even he isn't altogether satisfactory."

The doctor looked up sharply.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well," said Pat slowly, "he'd been drinking the other night, I'm sure, and yet I didn't dare to take the wheel away from

him. He drove perfectly. There was no trouble, and his daughter didn't seem at all uneasy. He wasn't—drunk, you know; just—well, more or less exhilarated. There wasn't anything to be alarmed about, really, only I didn't exactly like it."

"No," said the doctor, with a worried crease between his shaggy gray eyebrows. "No, I should think not; and I don't like it, either, Pat. I wish you wouldn't do it any more."

"But how can I help it, Dr. S. O. S.? We must have money, and now that I have my chauffeur's license"—Patricia had made a hurried trip to town on the Monday, and had procured that necessary document—"I'd feel rather silly not to use it. I don't want to give the whole thing up because one of my clients had been lunching not wisely but too well!"

She passed the thing off lightly, and the good old doctor tried not to let it worry him; but on the following day, when the man they still called John Garrison appeared, and with evident hesitation put before them the proposition that he should take up temporary quarters in Morgan Carrington's house, Dr. Stafford was distinctly relieved.

The matter was soon concluded, and on the very next day Garrison, who had now dropped his military title, presented himself in a civilian suit, well cut but somewhat worn. He carried two heavy suit-cases.

Mrs. Carrington received him effusively. Was he not one of the New York Garrisons? That in itself was sufficient recommendation in her eyes; and it seemed natural and right that they should have a guest in the house, especially a friend of Ned Driscoll's.

It was with a thrill of amused romance that Patricia watched the young man making up to her mother. Her own manner toward him was quite confidential, so far as the questions involved in her uncle's disappearance were concerned. They freely discussed her chosen occupation of public chauffeur—of which he seemed not entirely to approve; but toward her own thoughts and feelings she maintained a quiet reserve. Since he thought fit to visit them incognito, this cousin of hers should have to work for his discoveries as to her character, she said to herself; and she entered into the thrilling game with all the secret diversion which the situation afforded.

Dr. Stafford was delighted with his young and virile coadjutor. It was a relief to the old man's mind to have Garrison staying at the Carrington house. The fact that it had been entered once was hardly proof, Powell to the contrary notwithstanding, that it would never be entered again, and the young man's presence there was a distinct protection. He was trustworthy—of that the doctor felt sure. He had made it his business to see as much as possible of Garrison, and had been pleased with everything he saw. The young man was frankness itself, up to a certain point; but Stafford could not help noticing that he became unostentatiously uncommunicative when the talk drifted toward a question of his family and friends.

There was no doubt that he was intensely interested in the problem of Carrington's disappearance. He evidently thought it unnecessary to disguise that fact; and gradually he was put in possession of all the evidence in the case.

Patricia shrewdly suspected, though he gave no hint of having learned it, that he knew there was no money left at the Carstairs Trust. He seemed anxious to find a job, and during the first few days of his stay in the old white house on Broad Road, he went into town every day. He came back each night with evident discouragement. It seemed very difficult for him to find anything to do, and, remembering the loss of his fortune, Pat became more and more concerned. How could she take his money at the end of the week if, by that time, he had failed to find an income-producing occupation?

She showed so much sympathy and concern that Garrison was encouraged to tell her all his difficulties.

"I've had a good education, as far as that goes," he said as they sat together, one evening, on the piazza steps, looking off toward the late sunset. "It ought not to be difficult to find something to do. I didn't specialize in anything—that seems to be the main trouble. There was to have been an opening for me when I came back; but lots of things have happened since I went away. I wasn't expected back so soon, and the position hasn't materialized as yet. If only I had something to do to fill in the interim! I know a good deal about motor-cars. I might get into an automobile place—as a demonstrator, perhaps."

(To be continued in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

He spoke slowly, his eyes fixed on the girl's face. Suddenly he saw it brighten, and she turned to him with a little eager gesture.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Garrison, if we only had another car!"

The use of the word "we" brought a quick flush to the young man's sunburnt face, but he said nothing, and Patricia went on impetuously:

"There's more business than I can take advantage of right here in Stonehill. If my car were twins, they'd both be full for nearly all the evening trains. You wouldn't make a lot, of course, but it would be something to tide over. Only—"

"I think I might be able to get a car," said John Garrison excitedly. "To tell you the truth, I'd thought about just that possibility. But wouldn't you mind? We should be running in opposition, in a way, you know; but I wouldn't cut prices, and you could have the first chance."

"Oh, I think it would be splendid!" cried Patricia. "Then I wouldn't feel badly about—I mean there'd be nothing to worry about while you're waiting. But how can you get a car?"

Garrison leaned forward and plucked a few blades of grass from the graveled path at his feet.

"I think," he said, considering, "that I know of a car I can get—one that I can hire, I mean. They won't charge very much for it, I imagine, and I ought to be able to run it at a profit."

He glanced at her sidewise and then smiled at the look of happiness on her face.

"Oh, that will be wonderful!" replied Patricia. "It really is larks, driving a cab. Sometimes it isn't, altogether—but generally it's great fun. You mustn't forget to get a license, you know. You remember the trouble you saved me from," and she laughed joyously.

John Garrison did not tell her that this formality had already been complied with. He only said:

"Yes, I remember. I've been blessing that policeman ever since. If it hadn't been for him—"

He did not finish the sentence, but his brown, laughing eyes made his meaning quite clear. Pat blushed a little and glanced away at the purple rampart which bounded the horizon toward the glowing west.

Fillette and the Brown Girl

A HAPPY WIFE TELLS A SURPRISING STORY TO A
LONELY ONE

By Adriana Spadoni

HIS real name was not Puggins; neither was hers Fillette. They had called each other so two years before, for a joke, and somehow the names had clung.

It was three years since Joyce Martin, professor of botany, had brought Fillette back with him to Belmead. He had gone on one of his annual solitary excursions for strange flora and had returned with a new species of fern, a rare lichen, an original theory on toadstools, and Fillette. The women of Belmead—wives of professors, assistant professors, instructors, and even lower grades—had for once found common cause in wondering why Professor Martin had married her. The men wondered where he had found her. This almost describes Fillette.

In case the outlines are a trifle vague, however, Fillette was small and blond, and looked helpless. She was queer, too, in some things. She never seemed to understand that there were circles within circles in Belmead, and that she, as wife of the head of a department, had a right to the innermost. She had been known to refuse an invitation to tea from the wife of the head of the philosophy department because she had first promised the wife of an assistant in chemistry.

She was intensely interested in her husband's work, and Belmead understood that they worked together in the laboratory. Professor Martin had built in the attic. In summer they tramped away to an impossible cabin they had built half-way up the side of an outlandish mountain. They seemed to need no one outside of themselves. Fillette was so satisfied with her husband that the women of Belmead concluded she must have had a hard time to get him.

They were sitting together on the porch of the impossible little cabin. Professor

Martin's high, narrow shoulders were bent above a microscope, and his forehead was damp, for it was a hot day. Fresh leaves were trodden into the porch floor, and little pellets of brown earth dropped from the table with a tiny plop. The air was sharp with the pungency of bruised greenery.

At a smaller table Fillette sat pressing fern-fronds. From time to time she looked up and out across the railing which was all that kept them from tumbling down the side of Little Brother, rebounding from the narrow road cut in the mountainside, and plunging to the massed rocks far, far below, against which the blue sea beat, irresistible in its eternal power and patience.

Suddenly Fillette stopped working, stood up, and leaned on the railing. Along the yellow streak of road below a man on horseback was coming at an easy trot—a big man in khaki trousers, a blue flannel shirt, and a wide sombrero of gray felt. He rode loosely, giving to the motion. As he passed, he looked up, but he was so far away that Fillette could not distinguish his features. Nevertheless her eyes clouded, and something went out of her.

She watched the man disappear round the curve, going south toward Big Brother. Then she went and perched on the arm of her husband's chair, put one arm about his shoulder, and with the other pushed the microscope beyond his reach.

"Puggins, we've simply got to do something about the brown girl. I just can't sit here and know that she's throwing her life away!"

"Eh? What, dear?" Puggins's right hand moved out toward the microscope. "What is it? Won't the leaves—"

"It's not leaves, it's lives, Puggy." Fillette pushed the microscope farther away and laid her right hand on the wandering fingers. "This is the third time that man's

ridden toward Big Brother, and I'm sure Pete isn't at home."

"Well, sweetheart, I don't really know what we can do." The gentle eyes looked vaguely about, like lights vanishing in a fog. "If she's that kind of woman—"

"Nonsense, Puggy! There is no 'that kind of woman.' The brown girl is pretty and young and—probably so utterly lonely. She—"

"No! No!" Puggins shook his head thoughtfully, as if the matter were now coming into reach of his consciousness. "You're wrong, Fillette. There is that kind of woman, just as there are lower forms of plant and animal life. Everything is graded in a tremendous cosmic unity, but there are ends of the scale. In the final entity, of course, there—"

"Fiddlesticks!" With the tip of a small, soft finger Fillette lovingly outlined the coming bald spot on her husband's head. She smiled down upon him with an odd mingling of wistfulness and passionate possession. "Puggy," she whispered, "I'm going over there some day. I guess she's alone, day after day, in that bare gray ranch-house, and he rides over, and—and— She can't be more than twenty-one or twenty-two, Puggy."

Her husband reached up and drew both her arms down about his neck. Rubbing his cheek softly against a bare forearm, he smiled with tender wisdom across the little hands clasped beneath his chin.

"Go, dear, if you want to, but I hate to have you disappointed. You don't know nature, Fillette. Nature is unconscious, infinite, eternal, and indifferent. What you call sin or weakness or temptation is just a—a specimen that she doesn't need, that doesn't fit in. You're all heart, baby. You—"

"And you're all head, I suppose. 'Jack Sprat could eat no fat, and his wife'—eh, Puggy?"

Puggins stared, faintly bewildered. Then his eyes cleared.

"Jack gave all the fat to Mrs. Jack!"

He looked so happily triumphant at this deduction that Fillette laughed, gave him back his glasses, kissed the bald spot, and slipped from the arm of his chair.

Although she went back to her own table, she did not begin to work again. Instead, she sat gazing thoughtfully off to where the great golden sun was dropping toward the sea. Already the deep gorges of the moun-

tain were filling with night-blue shadows. Day was slipping away across the sea, following the sun, and night was coming quickly from the caverns and hidden places. Already the creek had lost its note of gay babbling, and was running swiftly, unhampered by the trivial gossip of dimpling shadow, sun-touched pools, and quivering leaves. Stern, cold, it bounded down, down, as if to atone for its dalliance with the day.

The sun dropped behind the rim of the sea in a splash of green and gold and lavender. With a sigh, Fillette rose, gathered the ferns together, weighted them for safety, and went in. As she moved about, preparing supper and glancing every now and then through the open door at Puggins, who was still working away in the last of the fading daylight, the smile came faintly back into her eyes.

When supper was ready, she put a branch of live-oak in a dull green jar, placed it in the center of the table, lit the shaded hanging lamp, and drew the denim curtains that she and Puggins had stenciled together. With this sudden lightening and darkening of the room behind him, Joyce Martin came to knowledge that the day's work was ended. He rose and tiptoed in to where Fillette bent over the oil-stove.

Suddenly covering her eyes with his hands, he growled:

"Ah-ha! Now I've got you!"

"Who is it?" Fillette squeaked through a suppressed giggle.

"The black man of the mountain!" Puggins hissed.

"I'll—call—my husband. Puggins!"

"What is it, dear? Here I am! Coming! Don't be afraid, sweetheart!" Puggins shouted, as if approaching from a great distance.

Then he whirled her round and kissed her. They both laughed.

Almost every night Puggins thought of a new game. He was proud of this fertility, which always made Fillette want to cry after she had laughed.

When supper was over, Fillette curled up on the couch with a book. Puggins lit the fire of logs laid ready in the huge stone fireplace, drew a deep chair before it, and was soon lost in a scientific treatise on "The Prehistoric Flora of the Western Hemisphere."

Outside, the trees moaned in the rising wind. The boards of the cabin made little

creaking noises. The booming of the surf overpowered the breathing of the fire, a faint reed against the blare of brass.

Fillette's book slipped to her lap. Her thoughts went out into the night, along the warm, thick dust of the road below, to the lonely ranch-house clinging to the mountainside. Like the strong, bare palm of the hand of God, the mountain seemed pushing it into the sea.

A loon laughed, and far back in the cañon coyotes fought and howled. The sea boomed and beat on the cliffs.

Fillette's small hands clenched. She slipped to the floor beside Puggins, and pressed close, as if to insure his presence. In a few moments he laid aside his book, and his hand moved gently over her golden head. For some time they sat silent, looking into the fire.

As the last log broke into a bed of glowing scarlet, the ridiculous little cuckoo chirped ten. Fillette rose. Puggins raked over the fire, set the two halves of the broken log upright to smolder out in safety, and pulled up the weights of the clock.

Half an hour later, on the platform under the pines, Puggins slept soundly, but Fillette lay awake, gazing at the big, golden stars and listening to the beat of the surf. It was very loud and coldly triumphant now. Like the brook, freed from the suppressing influences of the sun and the day, it flung the defiance of its power to the night.

When it was very late—so late that the stars were paling in the sky—she heard the horse's hoofs pounding softly in the road below. They were returning around the bend from Big Brother. The rider was whistling.

Fillette slipped her hand into her husband's. His fingers tightened mechanically over it, but he did not wake.

"I'll go to-morrow," Fillette whispered. "I must—I must!"

II

THE pink spot moving among the beehives stopped, and Fillette knew that the brown girl had seen her. Her pace slackened, and she was conscious of a faint tremor of excitement and fear. As she came nearer, so that she could distinctly see the features of the figure in pink, the memory of the man in the blue shirt, riding loosely, whistling in the night, focused to a clear vision just behind the girl.

Fillette squared her small shoulders and hurried toward the hives. The brown girl wiped her hands on her apron and smiled a greeting.

"I heard you was up. You're some later this year, ain't you?"

As Fillette took the girl's hand, she looked eagerly into her face. The brown girl had grown a little stouter, and a clear red ran under the once sallow skin. Her strong body was tightened and alert; but it was her eyes that gripped Fillette.

From the deep, thick brownness of them the resentment of last year was gone. They no longer shut one out. They seemed to invite. They were like an open door—but a door that has been left open, not opened deliberately. Something had entered the soul of the brown girl and had not quite shut the door behind it.

"Yes, we've been up three weeks. I meant to come over before, but the days slip by so!"

The brown girl's eyes were moving over Fillette's clothes—the soft felt hat, the short tweed skirt, the heavy brown tramping boots.

"I thought mebbe you weren't coming this year."

She seemed to be taking notes while she spoke.

"Not coming! Why, I can't imagine not coming to Little Brother!" At the mere suggestion Fillette looked alarmed. "That's mostly what we live for, from one year to another."

"You like it that much? Really?"

"It's glorious!"

For a moment Fillette forgot the brown girl and her own reason for coming. She could see only the cabin and the summer months alone with Puggins.

"Ain't you ever afraid?" It was scarcely more than a whisper forced from deeps within the brown girl. "The black nights when the trees talk and groan, and the coyotes howl, and the sea—ugh!" She shuddered. "Oh, I hate it! Nights, when I'm alone—"

She broke off. A dull red burned under the brown skin, and the strangely opened door of her eyes closed, leaving Fillette alone with the terror of the brown girl on nights when she was alone.

The buzzing of the bees, even the voice of the sea, had been stilled in the silence that rose from the very heart of the earth—rose slowly like a tidal wave to engulf

these two women with the vast, cruel indifference of the universe.

"Don't!" Fillette whispered. It was impossible to speak aloud in this stillness. "Don't! You mustn't feel like that. You mustn't think. You mustn't listen. Talk out loud—sing—pray—do anything; only don't listen—to the stillness!"

The girl caught at the word.

"You're afraid, too! You *know*!"

"No, no, no! I'm never afraid now—never!"

The eagerness died in the brown girl's eyes. Again she looked at the well-shaped boots, the well-cut skirt. She shrugged.

"You only come in the summer, when it's sunny and bright. You don't know what it's like in winter, when it rains and rains for days, and the ocean down there cries like it was dying and wanted to take me with it. You ain't tied here alone, feeling like something was pushing behind and reaching up after you in front, and there was no place to run, but you just had to stay and be dragged down—down!"

"Can't you go away? Couldn't you sell your house? There are less lonely places. Go anywhere!"

The girl smiled wearily.

"Sell? Pete wouldn't. He likes it. He ain't afraid. He wants to get more land."

"But if he knew that you are? Tell him. He'll do something. He just doesn't understand."

"Doesn't he? Then I can't make him. I did tell him early this spring. One night I near went mad. The wind was after me that night, and the sea, too, fighting to get me. I was like to die that night!"

"What did Pete say?"

"He didn't get home till Saturday. The sun was shining then."

Fillette turned to the ocean. Glutted with its own power, exhausted by a night of passion, it slept peacefully now, all its dazzling beauty bared in indifference to the sun.

"Why is Pete away so much?" she asked.

She wondered whether the brown girl was ever going to answer. At last the girl spoke. "It was a bad year last year, so this spring he took a job on the Morelos Ranch. Old Tippy looks after the pigs and the little stock we got, and I care for the chickens and the bees. He gets home Sundays. Morelos lets him off."

There was another silence, and then Fil-

lette said, without looking directly at the brown girl:

"If Pete isn't doing well, perhaps he would sell out and move away altogether. Would you rather live in a city?"

The other shrugged.

"No, he wouldn't sell. Last year was bad, but it was a dry year, and prices was low. We'd been doin' pretty well up till then, only we never have enough help to really run it. Tippy's old—very old," she repeated with a shiver, as if something within her shrank from the very fact of age, decay, and weakness. "He's almost deaf, too. Sometimes I feel like he's a ghost watching me."

"Couldn't Pete get a man and his wife to work on shares? It wouldn't be so lonely then."

The brown girl turned slowly and looked at Fillette with lowered lids.

"No," she said at last. "We don't want nobody working on shares. I don't want no other couple around."

Again there was a long silence, broken only by the murmur of the bees and the faint breeze in the tall weeds. Fillette felt something rising between herself and the brown girl—some power that would separate them beyond the possibility of meeting unless she overthrew it instantly.

The girl seemed to feel it, too, and stood as if waiting for something. Then, with a vague motion of acceptance, she moved toward the house.

"Come in and have a glass of lemonade, won't you?"

Fillette put her hand on the other's arm.

"Won't you come over and stay with me for a few days—for to-night, anyhow? It's going to be hot and terribly still to-night. I can't think of you all alone!"

"No, no—I can't. Thanks—I can't." The words ran from her like live things escaping from a cage. "I ain't as afraid as all that—not now, in summer. It's in winter—"

"Come! Please come! Come back with me now." Fillette, too, spoke in a low, swift tone, as if the other had not answered. "To-morrow Pete will be home. We'll talk things over with Mr. Martin. Perhaps there is some way to borrow the money, get some more stock and new machinery, and hire a real helper. Come and stay with us to-night!"

The color rushed from the brown girl's face.

"No!" she whispered. "I can't—not to-night. I can't to-night!"

Fillette's hands trembled so that she clasped them tightly, but her voice was beyond her control.

"You're not going to be alone to-night. He's coming—that good-looking foreman of the Britt Ranch—just as he came yesterday, late in the afternoon, and went back at dawn—the way he comes often now. You—"

The brown girl's hands clenched, and for a moment she held them above Fillette as if to strike. Then they fell.

"Well, and what business is it of yours? What do you know, anyhow, of a pain in here, inside, that gnaws, gnaws like a mountain lion gnaws a bone? There's something inside me that wants to live before it dies, to laugh and dance and be young just for a little while. You—you been looked after and fussed over all your life like you was a china doll. What do you know about being lonely, so lonely? What do you know about love?"

She shot out the word and it hit Fillette like a stone. Before the shame and anger in the eyes of the brown girl, Fillette's dropped.

"I supposed some meddling busybody would find it out," the girl said dully at last. "I don't care. I don't care for anything any more. I tried hard—you don't know—for the sake of little Tommy, and for Pete's sake, too; but it's too much!" She looked slowly over the mountain, back into the deep gorge, dark, chill, mysterious even in the full sunshine, out across the hot, passion-spent sea. "It's bigger 'n me. It don't care. Neither do I!"

Fillette dragged her eyes to meet the brown girl's.

"Listen! I—" Then it seemed that the hot, bare earth, the shadows of the gorge, began to push Fillette strongly, persistently, silently, into the sea. "I—can't talk here. Let's go into the house."

III

ON the porch a solemn, blue-eyed baby stopped playing with a set of blocks, stared, and lurched gravely over to his mother. The brown girl picked him up and cuddled him fiercely.

Staring out across the dry, shimmering earth, Fillette spoke in a low, even tone, without once turning toward the girl rocking the baby, who was now fast asleep.

"You think this is bad, where the sea and the wind cry and the coyotes howl and the creeks laugh. You're afraid of the voices of the earth. I was born where there was no sound except that of the wind sweeping across the earth all day and all night. Not the murmur of a leaf, not the cry of an animal—nothing. My father and mother were old and tired before I was born. They had fought the wind and the land, and it had beaten them. I was born with a terror of the land and the wind. I knew they would beat me, too.

"At night I used to lie awake and listen to the wind. It seemed to me that it always stopped just outside our frame house, and howled louder to scare me. It shut us in like a blanket. Even when I was very little, I could feel the years rushing by, carried away by the wind, without power to stop and wait for me.

"You say Pete doesn't want to give up his land. He wants to buy more. He plans, and has hope. My people had given up planning; they had no hope. You can never be absolutely alone when you have hope. We had none. I had only a misty knowledge that there was a world beyond the wind, and I wanted to go. All the bodily hunger and thirst, everything I felt or thought, was centered in that—to get out into that other world, to push somehow through the wall of wind, before it was too late, before it even swept away my wanting to go.

"When I was not quite eighteen, a man came. He wasn't specially good-looking, but he was big and happy. I wish I could make you understand what it meant—for the first time having somebody young and happy in the house. Pete is young. When he comes home, he talks and whistles and plays with Tommy; and you always have Tommy. I had nothing, only those two old, silent people.

"For the first week I saw very little of the strange man. Father said the doctor had ordered him West, because he had been working too hard in New York, and that he would stay a month. He was always out riding over the prairie, and when he came in to meals he told things that made the prairie seem like a different country. During the second week he began coming home earlier in the afternoon, and in the evening we would sit—late for us—talking. In the third week I liked to awake in the night and hear the wind. His room was

just under mine, and I liked to imagine that if the wind tried to get me, he would wake up and drive it away. For the first time in my life I felt *safe*.

"One day I told him about hating the wind. I don't know whether he asked me or I just told him. Anyhow he understood. It was the first great, overwhelming surprise of my life—that he understood. He knew exactly how it felt, and could express it better than I. Some things I had felt only in a shadowy way, like evil spirits waiting for me. He made them clear—terribly, frantically clear. After that we were always together. We rode off together, and then, far away from that awful, wind-swept house, we sat and talked. He told me of the world shut away behind the wind. I met him sometimes at night, and we rode silent for hours under the stars. He always understood, whether we talked or were still.

"He stayed in our house two months and three days. When he went away, I went with him."

"Oh!" the brown girl cried.

"We went East. We lived in different cities. We had lots of friends—men, always men. Sometimes we had to move. I didn't understand, and he never explained. He only laughed that deep, happy laugh that had made me all warm and glad when I had thought of it while the wind howled at night. He was always kind and jolly. I had clothes and jewelry, and we went to theaters and concerts. I had every single thing that I had felt sweeping by me in the wind; but it was hell!

"He had told me, that last night under the stars, that we would be married in the first town; but when we came to the town he said:

"To hell with this dump! Let's go on to a real city."

"In New York he told me that he was married already, so we couldn't be married; but he told me so gently, so—so understandingly, that I was sorry for him. I believed it hurt him. I tried not to let him see how I hated it—the small humiliations, the false names we had to give. She was always writing to him, and I got to know the envelopes. Sometimes she would have him followed, and would threaten him with suits—that is, when he was making good money.

"I could never forget the two old, broken people I had left. I wrote to tell them I

was properly married, and my mother's letter nearly broke my heart, she was so thankful for me. Then for the first time I knew that she was afraid of the wind and the bare, flat, reaching land, as I had been. She was almost hysterical with joy that I had escaped. So I kept it up. I wrote of the gay times we had, of my fine clothes, and of the presents he would suddenly thrust on me; but that wind-beaten house, those lean cows, my father and mother, haunted me. I got to dread his careless laughter more than I had ever dreaded the wind. I got to despise his easy tolerance, sliding out of unpleasantnesses, never facing and battling with anything, always grasping for every pleasure that came his way. It was worse than hearing life rush by in the wind."

Fillette shivered, and the brown girl buried her face in her arms.

"Don't! Don't!" she cried.

Fillette went on, more slowly now, as if the memory were crushing out her life as the reality had done.

"It was that way for a year and a half. Then, one morning, I woke to find that he had gone. He had left a note pinned to the pillow, and some money." A bitter smile touched Fillette's lips. "He said that he was going because he saw that he no longer made me happy; and that was all there was in life—happiness. It was just the kind of thing he had said so often on our long rides. He said that he would always feel very tender to me, that I had been a bright spot in his life, but that it was no use trying to keep the bright spot when the shadows fell. The brave thing to do was to recognize the truth and face it. He was always talking that way about 'facing the truth.'

"I went back. I told them that he had been killed. I sent to the nearest large town and got books. I took correspondence courses. I knew how to do things now. I studied—half the night sometimes. I wasn't afraid of the wind any more. I loved it, it was so strong and clean and *straight*! I studied for a year, and then I passed the teachers' examinations. I took a school in a district near town that year, and the following year I got one in town. The old folks sold the place and came to live with me. We lived together, and I made them happy, really happy, for three years. Then they died, one very soon after the other."

The brown girl was sobbing. Fillette rose and went to her.

"Won't you come? You will be glad afterward."

"I—was—going to go away—with him—to-night!"

"Never mind! You haven't gone. You need never go." She waited a moment and then added quietly: "I made a solemn promise to myself long ago that if I could ever save another girl, a young, lonely girl, from a man who 'understands,' I would tell her the story of my life. When I saw him riding over to your ranch in that young, care-free way, whistling—I had to come and speak to you."

The brown girl rose. Her eyes were tired. They no longer invited. They were closed against the power to feel. Only her arms gripped Tommy with a sureness of possession that awakened him and made him whimper.

"Come!" Fillette held out her arms,

and the brown girl yielded Tommy. "Write a note and tell Pete where you are."

As they came around the last bend of the road, Fillette saw Puggins, scarcely more than a speck at the edge of the little porch. Her eyes lit up.

"They're so wonderful," she said softly, "these men who *don't* understand!"

As they came nearer, she cupped both hands to her lips and sent a long, clear "Woo-ee, woo-eee!" into the still blue air. The human speck moved quickly to the other end of the porch and leaned far over the railing.

"Woo-ee!" it answered.

High on the mountainside, Puggins adjusted his glasses and peered at the two figures coming along in the thick yellow dust.

"Well, I'll be—damned!" he said slowly. "That little white and gold baby going out to reform the natives—and it looks as if she'd done it, too, by the Lord!"

TWO BEACONS

Two beacons shining through the night
Beckon me on. There is a light
In a sequestered home, small, slight,
But warm.

Above it gleams a star, in tune
With far-off symphonies; but soon
It will be gone like Lady Moon,
Eclipsed, forlorn.

Two beacons blaze to guide my way—
A tiny light with flaring ray,
A star, cold, still, and far away
From earth.

The star shines clear in heaven's vast hall,
The light is feeble, wind-blown, small;
But could a star replace the call
Of home?

Clouds hide the star from mortal sight,
The air grows cold; but look, the light
Is luring me from out the night
To come!

Star, you may light heaven's ample bow;
But I've found heaven down here below—
A house, a child, a candle's glow,
A home!

Mary Louise Mabie

The Third Manifest

THE LAWLESS CRUISE OF THE CONTRABAND SCHOONER SAN JOSÉ

By Victor Thaddeus

IT was the fourth and last trip of the bootlegging schooner San José from Lower California to San Diego. A fine, fast seaworthy vessel, equipped with gasoline power as an auxiliary to her large spread of canvas, she cleared the Mexican port of Ensenada under two separate manifests—one declaring that she carried a cargo of liquor for the islands, the other stating that she was bound for San Diego in ballast. Her crew consisted of the three partners, Stevens, Richell, and Knight, and a Mexican pilot. She carried in her hold case goods that Blasco Sierra had sold to them for twelve thousand dollars, which they would run ashore and smuggle over the border east of Tia Juana to net a clear profit of fifty odd thousand.

Stevens had been a bartender and saloon-owner in the Stingaree district of San Diego. Richell was a company promoter. Knight had furnished the San José with the experience necessary for successful evasion of port regulations, while his partners put up the initial capital.

A common lust for easy money had brought them together. A common fear of punishment was urging them apart. Their bonded stuff with the fine old labels was leaving a trail of blindness and death along the coast, and the State authorities had applied to the customs officials for information concerning the source of this insidious supply of poison. It was time for wise men to take their profits and get out.

Concerning the bad whisky and gin they were combing Southern waters to bring North, the three bootleggers had their own philosophy. They were buying it to sell to some one else, not to drink themselves, and later developments in the transaction did not interest them materially.

Blasco Sierra, tall and stooping, with other blotches on his sallow cheeks, was

smilingly frank about the quality of the goods he was turning over. Gin that bore the registered label of a famous brand, and that would retail at six dollars for a pint and seven fluid ounces, constituted the bulk of the cargo on this trip. Blasco, who was acquainted with Knight's weakness and vanity, warned them against it. The whisky was not good, but the gin was bad.

"There are a few cases of good gin," he said in his precise English. "They are what you would call the genuine article. There are even more cases the nature of whose contents is uncertain. It may be quite harmless, it may impair the eyesight." He blinked. "The majority of the cases—"

He smiled significantly; and the morning after the departure of the schooner he shipped south for Mazatlan on a tramp steamer.

Short, red-faced Knight had his own private stock on board; but the San José had not been on the high seas many hours before he was discovered in the hold, breaking open a case of gin. He became belligerent when told to go up on deck.

"Stick to your own stuff!" boomed Stevens.

The former bartender was fat and phlegmatic, with empty, bulging eyes, the shoulders of a Hercules, and a thunderous voice that shook him from head to foot, as if his whole body were hollow and reverberated to the vocal chords.

It was Knight's vanity that his palate resembled a keyboard on which every distilled liquor had its scale, and every grade its distinctive note. A few drinks had the effect of putting him on his mettle and challenging his powers of discrimination.

"I'll tell you what kind of gin we've got down here!" he boasted. "What the devil does that Mexican pig know about it?"

And, thrusting aside his companions, he sampled a bottle.

"Forty-seven and three-tenths per cent alcohol!" he declared, pointing to the label. "Good dry gin for a dry country! Whoever gets this at six dollars a bottle will be getting his money's worth. Dry gin for a dry country! Believe me, if there's one thing I do know something about, it's gin—known it ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper!"

He took Richell by the arm and tried to get him to argue the point, interrupting hostilities occasionally to laugh, thump his fists, and shout:

"Dry gin for a dry country!"

Next morning he could not see anything. To quiet him, Richell told him that his loss of sight was only temporary.

"It's like snow-blindness. It comes from always having a cigar in your face. You've poisoned your system with nicotin!"

Richell, small, lean, and nervous, had protruding upper teeth and a quick smile, and liked to talk about the various speculative enterprises in which he had been engaged. Now he took Stevens to the bow where there was less danger of the sick man, who lay tossing in the cabin, overhearing their conversation. Drawing his coat collar about his face, he lit a cigarette and peered between his hands and his cap at the saloon-keeper.

"We warned him," he said in thin, nasal tones. "It's his own fault!"

Stevens had as little sympathy for the blind man.

"That's what he gets for trying to show off like a kid!" he growled. "He got what was coming to him!"

His heavy face flushed evilly. Taking a black briar pipe from his pocket, he pressed tobacco into the bowl with a stubby thumb, and leaned against the rail glaring down at the water. Richell, who had cast away his cigarette after a single inhalation, stood watching him with a shrewd, beady eye, as if weighing an investment.

"Well, now that he is blind, what are we going to do with him, Tom?" asked the promoter finally. "He'll never be able to see again, but I'm afraid he'll talk!"

Stevens swung around as if at a personal insult, raising a hairy fist.

"He won't talk if I tell him not to!" he declared.

"He'll get vindictive because he's blind and we're not. We've got to get rid of

him. We'd better chuck him overboard," advised Richell.

Abrupt himself, abruptness in another scared the saloon-keeper. He backed over to the weather bow, opening his hands slowly as if Richell's brutal words were exerting a powerful physical effect.

"Why do we have to do that?" he asked hoarsely. "You're crazy!"

A cry from the pilot at the wheel made them turn, to see Knight crawling over the forecandle toward them.

"Tom Stevens! Dick Richell! Where are you?" he cried.

But he shook them off as soon as they had raised him to his feet, shouting:

"Why do you fool me? I am blind! I know I'm blind, and I know what did it! The gin did it, and I'll never see again! The gin, the dry gin—oh, God! I must have picked a bad case!"

"You might have picked a worse one," soothed Richell, who shrank from scenes. "You picked one of the uncertain ones. If you'd picked one of the worst kind, you'd probably be dead."

Knight shook his fists helplessly at the sky, bawling:

"Sell it to 'em! By God, sell it to 'em!"

There followed an almost startling quiet, broken by the murmur of splashing water and the wind in the rigging.

"This acid, this fire, this poison!" Knight raved. "I only hope it blinds 'em and tortures 'em like it's doing me!"

"Just because you go blind drinking bad liquor you want other folks to go blind, too! That's nice talk for you!" growled Stevens.

"Yes, I do! And so do you, you infernal hypocrite! Ain't you selling it?"

"I don't wish for them to go blind," said Stevens cautiously. "I don't give them no guarantees, an' it ain't my fault if they drink it. I don't drink it!"

The owner of the San José clutched at him with furious hands.

"I wish you would drink some!"

"Would you want me to go blind, too?" inquired Stevens, squinting down at him.

"Yes, I would! I wish both of you would! What did you let me drink it for? I've opened cases before, and they didn't do me no harm. It tasted O. K."

The saloon-keeper laughed brutally.

"It hit the wrong note, I guess, or else your pianner needed tuning!"

The promoter, who stood with his hands

in his pockets, apparently indifferent to this conversation, interrupted.

"See that pelican fishing over there, Tom?" he said. "He dropped out of the sky like a chunk of lead. They must have good eyes to see the fish in this choppy water. It's going to rain."

The words had an uncanny effect on Knight. He became hysterical. He swore that not one case of the liquor should be sold. If it were sold for a million dollars he would be none the richer, for he had lost his sight. Disheveled, unshaven, his habitually red face shining with a repellent pallor, he staggered about the fore-castle, indifferent to collisions with the rigging, promising them that they should not make a cent from his trip, and shouting that the schooner was still his property.

Stevens stood with his arms crossed on his stomach, his cap at an angle on the back of his head, and his round eyes narrowed to two gleaming lines that never left the blind man. Richell watched them both, casting quick, furtive glances.

"Get me a cigar!" ordered Knight. "You get it, Tom! You're standing there laughing at me! If I can't see, I can smoke."

"It seems to me you can talk some, too," said Richell.

"Talking don't do me any harm now!" was the reply. "Won't you do *nothing* for me, Tom?"

"I'm going!" growled the saloon-keeper.

Returning from the cabin, he placed a cigar between Knight's teeth. Knight found himself suddenly in the arms of the big man.

"What are you doing? Where are you taking me?" he asked fearfully.

"Into the cabin. This glare and glitter ain't good on your eyes," answered Stevens.

Striding to the lee rail, he discharged the man overboard as if from the arms of some automatic handling device. Then he stooped, puffing, to pick up the cigar that Knight had dropped, and tossed it after him, shouting:

"Take this with you! So you'd like to see Tom Stevens blind and in the brig, eh?"

II

RICHELL jumped forward.

"What did you do that for?" he snapped.

Stevens had a secret fear of the promoter. He was afraid of Richell's shrewd-

ness; but to the question he felt he could answer with legitimate indignation:

"Didn't you say for to chuck him overboard?"

"Not like that, you fat fool! He was blind, and might have crawled over without knowing what he was doing. We'd have helped him over the taffrail when the Mexican wasn't looking. He saw you do that!"

The barbarous tattoo of a great drum seemed to rush up from the pit of his stomach and roar in the big saloon-keeper's ears.

"I'll fix that Mexican, too!" he yelled, and rushed aft to where the pilot, with hands off the wheel, was staring at the wake.

The Mexican was small and elusive. Fear gave him a desperate energy, and made him hard to catch. Fear of a different nature urged Stevens on in the pursuit, clutching with fat hands and yelling like a madman. The pilot was cornered in the bow after Richell had joined in the chase. Stevens beat his fingers loose, and lifted him like a child.

"Hold on! We can't let him go like that!" said Richell, stopping him.

"Why not, with the coast thirty miles away and not a ship in sight?" shouted Stevens.

"Better not take any chances," declared the promoter in his sharp, businesslike voice. He drew a forty-five automatic and fired. "Now chuck him over!"

Then he took the wheel, lit another cigarette, inhaled once, coughed, and stamped the tobacco and paper into a little pile that was blown away as soon as he removed his foot.

Stevens, with sweat running down his face and dripping from the back of his head, threw his coat over the boom and walked athwartship, growling to himself like a caged animal.

"It don't bear the label of the San José. Once it gets distributed among the retailing agencies, who knows where it comes from or who brought it into the country?" he muttered.

Richell paid no attention to him, but sat watching the rain.

"I said it was going to rain," he said.

The drops were like myriads of tiny, shining fingers pointing up out of the waves. The sea began to slap the hull and spray the deck, as a fair wind rose in the starboard quarter.

Stevens sat cursing the rain.

"That was a massacre, but it had to be finished after you'd started it," said Richell.

"Then I guess I did right!" growled his companion.

"The devil you did! If we hadn't needed a pilot, would we have taken him along on a venture like this? It would be different if we still had Knight. Why didn't you wait until we'd got up farther? Who's going to take this schooner up the coast? Can you?"

Stevens growled that he thought so.

"I *think* so, too," snapped the promoter; "but thinking won't get us anywhere!"

It got them as far as the last of the Capitan Rocks, sixty miles to the south of the Coronado Islands, and thirty miles from the peninsula. There, after a day's sailing under a clear sky, the San José piled up at one o'clock in the morning, with a quiet sea, a round yellow moon dead ahead, the Milky Way trailing across the black heavens, Richell asleep in the cabin, and Stevens asleep at the wheel.

The saloon-keeper infected Richell with his madness. Bellowing that the schooner had gone to kingdom come, he declared that there was still a chance to save the cargo. Tearing open the hatchways, he threw up case after case from the hold.

A broad, gentle swell came out of the darkness, lifted the San José, opening the great rent in her hull, and washed the schooner in to a shelf of rock the height of her rail.

"Jump on there!" ordered Stevens. "I'll pass 'em over to you!"

He had passed over one case of whisky and twenty of gin when the schooner sank.

With the San José sank Richell's superficial courage. Physically a coward, when the jib-boom sticking obliquely past the rock was all that remained visible of the vessel, the situation appalled him. He beat the cases with his fists.

"Why didn't we salvage something to eat and drink?" he cried. "What's the use of these?"

He pushed one of them off the reef.

Stevens had him by the throat in a minute. He no longer feared the promoter's shrewdness. The merciless beast was dominant in him.

"Leave those there if you don't want to be choked!" he roared. "Why didn't you think of it? I couldn't think of everything. I thought you was a clever, edu-

cated man. We'll signal the first boat that passes."

"We'll starve to death!" wailed Richell, clinging to the jib-boom. "We'll shrivel up with thirst! No boats ever pass along this miserable coast!"

III

WHEN dawn came, they searched the crevices of the reef for rain-water; but most of it had seeped out or had been sucked up by the sun, and what little remained was contaminated with salt water.

They sat there watching the clouds, white during the day, gray when the sun had gone, black as metallic sludge until the moon rose, and then white again. Here was water distilled from the sea, even as liquor from the mash. It rolled at their feet and marched far overhead.

All that day, and the next, they scanned the horizon with swimming eyes, while the hot summer sun beat down on the Capitan Rocks, and was flung back, transformed into a horde of tiny, dazzling darts, from the quiet sea. They could keep themselves cool, but they had no means of combating the terrible thirst that was parching their throats and cracking their lips.

As they sat there, confronted by the cases of liquor, with the glittering ocean stretching for countless leagues about them, a monstrous fear was reflected in their eyes. When the saloon-keeper plunged toward the cases, Richell held him back, saying hoarsely:

"Do you want to sit here blind, not knowing when a ship *does* go by?"

"That's right!" said Stevens, whose gruff voice was becoming like an echo from a cave.

Another time Stevens interfered when Richell weakened. A tacit understanding existed between them that neither should allow the other to touch the liquor. Their fear was mutual—the vision of two men who sat waiting for a rescue ship that was steaming past their sightless eyes.

To keep up his courage, Richell maintained an incessant gabble, like a senile woman, mumbling about the various swindles he had promoted, about the deal with Blasco Sierra, about schemes for salvaging and marketing the sunken cases after they had been rescued; but water was his principal theme.

The word seemed to possess a liquid, dripping sound. It conjured up realistic

images of rivers, lakes, wells, fountains. It reminded them of all the water they might have drunk, but had left untouched. It made them think of people hurrying with bent heads down slippery, shining streets; of cloudbursts and thunder-storms, and dogs snatching mouthfuls of snow from smooth, high drifts.

"Stop talking about water!" groaned Stevens. "I shall go crazy!"

But the word obsessed him also, and he began to connect it with a third manifest—a true one—of the San José, which he fancied was being declared to a priest in the port of Ensenada.

Richell fell on his knees and prayed for rain, clutching toward the clouds as if trying to drag them out of the sky; but the rain had come and gone, and the sun rose and sank again in a blue sky.

Wild-eyed, the saloon-keeper caught hold of Richell and whispered in his ear.

"This trouble all come because we lied!" he said. "We wasn't in ballast for San Diego!"

Richell, dazed by weakness, did not reply. Stevens took him by the hair and shook him.

"Eh, what do you say?" asked the saloon-keeper.

"No!"

"And we wasn't taking liquor to the islands?"

"No!"

Stevens tapped his naked breast.

"I got it here," he said—"the true manifest!"

Richell realized that his life depended upon humoring the giant.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A cargo of water in gold-lined tanks bound for Albuquerque!" answered the saloon-keeper, dropping his voice to an echo of a great, coarse whisper. Albuquerque was his home town.

Richell crept away from him in horror. He realized that Stevens was going crazy.

Yet it was the promoter who first lost control of himself and began drinking seawater, after having passed it through his coat-pocket in a vain attempt to filter out the salt.

Stevens, watching him through eyes that were nearly shut, had a sudden idea. It struck him that men who could get all the fresh water they wanted still were willing to pay eight dollars a quart for bad liquor, but never drank salt water. Here was a

crazy man drinking salt water when twenty cases of liquor lay on the rock beside him!

So he broke open a case and took out a square bottle. Two words in raised glass letters pierced his reeling brain like the last terrible arrows of rational consciousness—"dry gin."

Dry, blinding gin! The first word maddened him with its mockery; the second appalled him. He saw Knight swimming in circles, and Blasco Sierra, with sucked-in cheeks and protruding tongue, making his peculiar grimace. Dry gin for a dry country, dry gin for a man dying of thirst! He wanted something wet, cases and cases of it, to quench his unquenchable fever.

He broke into the whisky and drank, coughing. Then he tottered to the prostrate Richell and began to beat him with the jagged remnants of the bottle.

Overhead, like the dust of a great cavalcade passing above the tiny stage of the bare rock, an army of white clouds crossed the blue sky in the direction of the faint purple line of Mexico.

IV

An hour later, as it was starting to rain, a customs officer who landed on the reef from the cutter *President*, found the two bootleggers lying dead beside a case of bad whisky and nineteen cases of bottled water.

Warily, with the same puzzled expression, he sampled case after case. He held the square, sealed bottles with the rounded backs and registered labels up to the sun, and looked through the colorless, transparent liquid which, in physical appearance, might be either gin or water. All contained water.

Blasco Sierra might have made out a third manifest. He would have sworn to a hundred and fifty cases of what might be called the genuine article, and to three hundred cases of uncertain quality, possibly harmless, probably injurious to the eyesight. And, having a strain of poetry in his nature, he would probably have declared two thousand cases as containing that wholesome stuff which rises mysteriously from the land, tumbles plenteously from the clouds, and washes the marrow of mountains into the contaminated ocean.

But he preferred to smile, and to leave for Mazatlan, grimacing when advisable, and to shake hands cordially with his friends, the three *Americanos*, whom he never expected to see again.

The Deck-Hand

AN EVENTFUL CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF BIFF HAWKINS,
ROUGH-NECK

By William Merriam Rouse

A DECK-HAND is supposed to be a rough-neck, anyway, but Biff Hawkins went all bets some considerable better, and even then he wasn't satisfied. He kept crowding his reputation all the time.

Jeremiah was his regular name, but he had growed up to the title of Biff, over on Bildad Road, on account of that one word being a complete description of a fight with him. He always hit first, and that was the end of it. The only time he'd ever been licked was at a kitchen tunk at Pete Murdock's house. While Biff was busy for thirty seconds licking the two Bull boys, Pete crept up behind him and laid him out with a stove griddle.

Biff got too tough even for Bildad Road, and so he took to steamboating; and he hadn't been on the lake a week before they knew about him from Whitehall to St. Albans Bay. Not that the Myrtle ever sailed as far as them places—she was a lopsided hooker that took out parties by guess and good luck under old Cap'n Tom Barker; but Biff got himself celebrated by licking the fireman, the engineer, and the other deck-hand the first day he worked.

If it hadn't happened early in the week, Biff would have been fired. But he went to work on a Monday morning, and as Cap'n Tom only got sober on Sunday, in order to go to church, the whole thing had blown over by the time another Sunday had come around and he was able to take notice of things.

Otherwise Biff would have ended before he got started, for Cap'n Tom was conscientious about everything—even the way he soaked city people. If the men folks wore white pants, he charged 'em ten dollars a head. If they didn't, it was five, and you couldn't get him to take less or more.

Biff was hard to look at, the best you could say for him. When the Myrtle come in to the Port Mary dock, with Biff standing in the bows ready to throw a line, it made you think of Noah's Ark with a gorilla for a figurehead. Not that Biff was mean-looking or dirty; but a man with a neck as thick as his head, and three inches of hair on his chest, don't remind you none of a picture in the mail-order catalogues.

The first time Biff Hawkins saw Betty Porter was when she took her school for an excursion to celebrate the finish of the year. She come of a well-to-do family across the lake in Vermont, and didn't have to work, but she had gone to teaching in the Coon Mountain district to keep busy. Except for seven or nine different specially arranged circumstances, like her wanting to work, and having money to hire the Myrtle, and so on, Biff Hawkins never would have had a chance to speak to a girl like her—which shows that a man sails his course, whether he knows it or not.

She and about two dozen youngsters of all shapes and sizes scattered themselves everywhere from the engine-room to the wheel-house, and the Myrtle snorted and got off, with Cap'n Tom still able to keep her in Lake Champlain, although it was Saturday, and MacLean, the engineer, cussing as usual.

Biff went aft to open up some more camp-chairs. He went feeling all right and natural, and he come back forward the same way he'd been that night Murdock hit him with the griddle, the only difference being that he could walk this time. Betty Porter had got in the first wallop.

She hadn't done anything but say "thank you" to him; but when a girl with hair and eyes as black as four o'clock in the morning, and a skin like apple-blossoms,

says "thank you," it generally sounds good. It did to Biff. He would have bit a chunk out of a propeller blade to hear her say "thank you" again. When he got back to the forward deck, he staggered to a cleat where he could set down and look aft and watch her leaning over the starboard rail.

Hunky Dawes, the other deck-hand, come up out of the forecandle and set down side of Biff. There wasn't any hard feelings between them on account of the fight. After Hunky had boned a chew of tobacco off of Biff, he looked aft to see what Biff was looking at. He saw. Hunky took a long breath and whistled.

"Some girl!" he said. "She can put her shoes in my trunk—"

That was as far as he got, for Biff smothered the rest of it. On account of being so mad he couldn't fight proper, Biff didn't get in his knockout wallop the first thing, and that give Hunky a chance. They spread all over the deck.

The kids begun to holler. Cap'n Tom sailed on, being glued to the wheel when in a stewed condition. The engineer sent up Jim McCann, the fireman, with a shovel, to commit manslaughter; and he probably would have tried if Betty Porter hadn't come forward on the run and beat him to it.

Biff Hawkins had just got a hammer-lock on Hunky, and was trying to bust a hole in the deck with his face, when Betty reached down and took Biff by the collar. She didn't look any way at all like she had when she said "thank you" a few minutes before.

"You get up!" she said to Biff.

He let go of Hunky and scrambled onto his feet. She kept a hold of his collar, although she had to stand on tiptoe to do it.

"Yes, ma'am," said Biff.

Hunky groaned, rolled over, and set up. He was considerable damaged.

"What did you do that for?" she asked Biff.

"I—I didn't like his language."

"What the—" Hunky stopped, partly because he remembered the girl was there, and partly because Biff made a lunge at him. "This is the first time I ever heard of Biff Hawkins not liking any kind of language!"

She looked from one to the other, not being able to make it out, and then at the fireman. He was grinning; so she grinned, too, and let go of Biff. Then she got down

side of Hunky, right on that dirty deck, with her clean white dress, and began to patch up his nose and eye and upper lip where Biff had damaged him.

She told Biff to go get some water and a clean handkerchief. He went. Not having any white handkerchiefs of his own, he stole one out of the engineer's stateroom, and inside of two minutes he was acting as nurse while she doctored up Hunky.

The fireman told the engineer, and he come up on deck to see it—the first time he'd been known to leave his engines since he shipped on the Myrtle. He didn't say a word when he recognized that handkerchief by the lavender initial in the corner. Cap'n Tom was the only one that didn't pay any attention, and he couldn't, not being able to get his mind out of the groove where he set it every week before he started to lick up.

"Biff," said Hunky, as soon as she got through fixing him, "I don't blame you none—not none at all. What's more, I'd be willing for you to do the same thing again any time!"

"Of course," said Biff, looking about as cheerful as a man with a boil. "But after this, if they's anybody gets busted up, it's going to be me. You can bet your bottom dollar on that, Hunky Dawes!"

Betty Porter laughed, and it was like the sun breaking out after a thunder-storm. She wasn't one of those long-faced women that enjoy going around telling folks what a bad lot they be. Now that she had stopped a fight that wasn't doing nobody any good, she was willing to see the joke.

"You come up in the rear of the boat with me," she says to Biff. "I've heard about you, and I want to find out what it is that makes you so ferocious."

Biff cheered up, and it was Hunky's turn to look like a hearse.

"I'm as ferocious as he is!" Hunky told her, but she didn't pay any attention.

There wasn't any discipline on board, on account of Cap'n Tom not being willing to bother with it, so Biff went aft and sat down like a passenger.

Betty Porter looked him all over. She looked at his eighteen neck, and at the place where the hair didn't grow on account of the stove griddle, and at Biff's mahogany-colored face, which was now a fine, rich blood-red.

"What do you fight so much for?" she said after a while.

"It comes natural," he told her.

"Do you mean you can't control your temper?"

"It ain't that," said Biff. "I don't very often get mad. I was mad to-day, and that's why I didn't finish him with one wallop. Mostly I fight because it's fun."

A look came into her eyes that made Biff feel like a worm that's made a mistake and tried to crawl across the road. He caught a glimpse of her teeth, but she wasn't smiling.

"And I suppose you kick dogs around to hear them yelp? And pull children's hair? And walk across flower-gardens whenever you have a chance?"

Biff Hawkins had never before in his life felt sick or miserable; but right then, all of a sudden, he felt so sick and miserable that he wanted to die. He wanted to die all over, dead. For a minute he couldn't see; and the first thing he knew tears was running along the port side of his nose.

"I nev—never did!" he told her. "I got a dog up on Bildad Road, and if a man hurt that dog I'd take the cuss apart and feed the pieces to the hogs!"

Betty Porter see she'd done something mean to Biff, and she begun to cry, too. She wasn't bashful about it at all. She blubbered right into her handkerchief.

"Oh!" she said. "I wouldn't have said that for a thousand dollars! No, not for a million! Please—please forgive me!"

"Forgive you? Why, you can say anything you want to say to me, and I'll be tickled to death! I'd rather have you talk rough to me than hear a boat-load of angels sing!"

She looked at him, and he looked at her, and the beginning of an ending was made right then and there. They talked a little bit more before she let on it was time for him to go forward. The way they left it, he was to go to her schoolhouse to get some books and to bring her a spaniel pup, if he could find one.

II

AFTER that it run along quite a spell with the usual thing happening. She had taken a liking to Biff, just the way you would to a mastiff that was naturally good-natured but hadn't been brought up to mind; and he knew that she was an angel that had got spilt out of heaven some way and was teaching school in the Coon Mountain district.

Biff paid five dollars to one of the Ord boys for a pup that was more or less spaniel, and told her he found it in the road with no place to go. She give him a United States history and a life of Abraham Lincoln, and Biff was in a fair way to go to the dogs as a deck-hand. First off he quit getting drunk, then he quit chewing tobacco, and by the middle of the summer he didn't swear more than was necessary. He was so tame he let Hunky Dawes bawl him out in front of the whole crew.

Hunky quit the Myrtle then and there. It wasn't any pleasure, he said, to work with a man that could fight and wouldn't. He said he couldn't bear to stay and watch Biff's foolish misery. There was a good deal in that, too, for Biff went around looking 'most as bright as a sheep, with a book in his pocket, and an earful of cussing from the engineer, who didn't believe in either love or religion.

Hunky got him a dinky little motor-boat that would run when she didn't have a coughing spell, and went into business for himself. He seemed to kind of like Biff, in spite of being disgusted with him; and once or twice a week he'd come on board to look him over and see if he'd got any worse.

Biff had to wake up some time. He had got into the habit of carrying a mess of junk to the school-teacher every Sunday, the way a fool dog brings home bones. Flowers, pocket-sized mud-turtles, a three-colored kitten—anything he could get a holt of that was out of the regular run of things he'd take to Betty Porter. And she pumped book-learning into him as fast as he could swallow it, and maybe faster.

Biff was naturally as quick with his head as he was with his hands, and before long he got so he could read without breathing hard. He picked up a wonderful lot of information about great men and such, most of which he'd tell over to Eddie Pecor, the new deck-hand, evenings, after the Myrtle got in from a trip. It wasn't regular, the way that rough-neck quieted down. Along toward the last he'd have took milk out of a bottle without a whimper.

But he woke up. It was a Sunday, and he had hoofed it over to Coon Mountain with a sweet-grass basket full of flowers he'd picked early that morning. It was one of them summer days that's made on purpose to throw folks off their balance—warm and soft and blue, with a little breeze

blowing and everything kind of stretched out to rest and enjoy life.

Biff and the school-teacher went for a walk, and sat down on some rocks where they could look out over a mile or two of woods and see Lake Champlain.

"You're a changed man, Jerry," said Betty Porter, after a while. She had found out his real name and decided that "Jerry" was the proper way to get around the horrible truth. She didn't care much for "Biff," as being a relic of the past.

"Yes," said Biff, "ever since the first day I saw you."

"Don't you see how different the world is when you look at it right?"

"It's been different," Biff told her, "ever since that day."

"You've got a start now. You can educate yourself."

"Yes."

"It all depends on the way you look at people, Jerry. When you stand off by yourself, snarling like an ugly dog, you never get anywhere or anything. People are all one big family."

"I always felt that way about dogs and horses—and trees, too," Biff told her; "but the meanness of some humans is too much for me."

"They don't mean to be mean," she said. "You keep on reading and thinking, and you'll see. Some are scared, and some are selfish, but they don't want to be—not any of them. Why, look at yourself! You didn't want to be mean!"

"Maybe so," said Biff. "If you say so, it must be right; but I got to say I can't see it. The new deck-hand is yellow, Cap'n Tom ain't fit to be skipper of a rowboat, and McLean, the engineer, never says a good word for anybody. I wouldn't have been any better than I was if it hadn't been for you."

"Oh, yes, you would!" she told him; but they both of them knew she wasn't sure about that.

"I wouldn't be anything without you." He waited a minute after that, trying not to say what was trying to bust out of him. He didn't know how to say it, and he didn't want to, but he couldn't help it any more than he could help coming over to Coon Mountain every Sunday. "I—I wish—I wish I could—m-m-marry you!"

The minute he got the words out Biff was so scared that he went blind, the way you do with a sunstroke. When he could

see again, she was standing up in front of him. She was so pale her eyes looked like burnt holes in a blanket.

"Oh, Jerry!" she said. "I was afraid you'd say that! Don't, Jerry!"

"I'd ought to be shot!" growled Biff, and he felt worse inside than he had that first day on the Myrtle. "You just forget what I said, and I promise never to mention it again. Of course you wouldn't want to marry a rough-neck like me. I'd ought to be kicked all over a ten-acre lot!"

She kept on looking at him the same way. Pretty soon she doubled up her fists and drove them against her cheeks so he could hear her teeth click.

"I can't!" she groaned. "It's too—too queer! I want to, but I can't!"

Then she ran. Before his head had stopped spinning, she was out of sight.

After he'd made the first jump, he stood still. He knew what she meant, and he had sense enough not to follow her. It was queer, right enough, for a girl like her to care anything about Biff Hawkins, a rough-neck deck-hand that had been too tough for Bildad Road. He could understand why she couldn't marry him, but he couldn't understand why she should even think she might want to.

"I'll keep away from you if it kills me!" he yelled; and he shook his fist at the place where she'd gone into the woods. "If I don't, I hope I may go to hell with my back broke!"

III

BIFF started back for Port Mary; and from that day on he kept his word about leaving Betty Porter alone. He didn't go to Coon Mountain again.

It wasn't long before Hunky Dawes told him he'd taken her back over the lake, to spend the rest of the summer vacation with her folks. Then Biff realized that she must have been staying on in the Coon Mountain neighborhood on his account; and he cursed himself until he choked.

He didn't get a glimpse of her again until school opened, the last part of September. He saw her when she came to Port Mary, for Hunky brought her across the lake in his motor-boat. The Myrtle was just putting out on a trip. Biff thought she smiled at him, and he waved his hand.

After that she got Hunky to take her home every Friday or Saturday and bring her back Sundays, so she could spend the

tail-end of the week with her people. Hunky told Biff she'd engaged him to do that until it got too cold and rough in the fall of the year.

The weeks went pretty hard for Biff Hawkins. He blew up and got drunk once; but after that he settled down to behaving himself again, and reading more books. It wasn't exactly that he was working for anything special, but there was a good deal of bulldog in Biff. As long as he'd started to get some book-learning, he made up his mind to go on and see if it took on him. He didn't know where he was going to wind up, and he didn't care much of any to speak of.

Parties for Cap'n Tom to take out kept getting fewer and fewer, and it drew along toward the time when it wouldn't pay to keep the Myrtle in commission any longer. She was usually the last boat in Port Mary to lay up for the winter; and this fall Cap'n Tom hung on, the same as always, until it got cold enough to freeze the hair off a dog.

Finally there was days when the Myrtle stayed at the wharf all day with nothing to do, and Cap'n Tom decided to quit. Every year he waited like that until the income run below expenses, for he figured he could drink more licker when he was sailing than he could when he stayed ashore. He always calculated to make the farewell trip of the season a jamboree.

The last trip this year was taking a bunch of cattle-buyers from Port Mary to Burlington. That was on a Saturday. Cap'n Tom planned to come back on Sunday, missing church for the first time since he'd had his master's license, and to lay her up Monday.

About sunrise Saturday morning he came aboard with a heavy list to starboard. McLean had steam up, and they cast off as soon as the passengers had counted noses and found they was all there.

It was a fine, clear day, with the lake sparkling like summer and the air nipping cold like winter. There was a considerable swell from a blow the night before, but it was a long way from what you'd call rough weather. Cap'n Tom cut a few circles with the Myrtle, and then he turned the wheel over to Biff, while he went to work entertaining the cattle-buyers.

The Myrtle was about a mile off Sherman Inlet, on the Vermont side of the lake, and heading due north, when Cap'n Tom remembered something about being skip-

per and come back to take the wheel again. He was making pretty heavy going of it, on account of the swell and the extra number of drinks he'd took, and Biff kind of thought they'd get along toward Burlington faster if he kept the wheel. He spoke about it, and of course it put the captain on his dignity right off.

"I'm captain, pilot, first mate, and tee-total owner of this scow!" Cap'n Tom told him. "I can sail her in the dark of the moon with my eyes shut. All me and the Myrtle needs is steam, and we can go anywhere. You get forward!"

"All right, cap'n," Biff said. "It ain't my boat, and I'm getting paid for my time. Twin Reefs are off the port bow, and you want to hold her as she is."

"I'll hold her as she goes," said Cap'n Tom, "and the devil take the hindmost! I'm going to show them hayseeds aft that I can make the Myrtle waltz, two-step, and jig—also double shuffle! Biff, you just get forward!"

Biff went. He got his mackinaw out of the forecabin and sat down up in the bows. Now and then he could hear the passengers whooping it up on the after deck and in the cabin. Eddie Pecor was below, so he had the forward deck all to himself. Once in a while he'd look toward the wheel-house and take a slant at Cap'n Tom, who was leaning hard on the wheel and talking to himself.

There wasn't a sail in sight, except that 'way off toward the New York side Biff could make out a little put-put coming. That would probably be Hunky Dawes taking Betty Porter home for over Sunday. It was pretty heavy for Hunky's little egg-shell, and the thought of what might happen to Betty if anything went wrong didn't help Biff's peace of mind.

He got to thinking of that, and so he kind of lost track of Cap'n Tom's capers. He knew the Myrtle wasn't sailing a straight course, but he didn't actually believe there'd be any trouble until he pitched off the cleat where he was sitting and slid four or five feet along the deck on his nose.

Before he brought up in the scuppers he knew she'd struck. He could feel the grate and grind as she kept going on.

By the time he got himself right side up again she floated clear. The engines had stopped, but she still had headway enough to keep her at a pretty good clip.

Inside of five seconds everything had

changed on board the Myrtle. Old Cap'n Tom come out of the wheel-house, dead white, with his mouth twitching and not a sound coming out of it. About half of the dozen passengers realized what had happened, and they began to flutter around in circles.

Eddie Pecor bobbed up from below. He yelled once, and made a run for the boat that had been lashed on top of the cabin ever since the Myrtle was first put into commission.

McLean popped out of the engine-room, with McCann behind him, and both of them looking like bad-dispositioned devils. The fireman took a chew of tobacco and spit over the side. McLean put an eye on the old man that ought to have made him dry up and blow away.

"The bottom's ripped out of her!" he told him. "Engine's flooding, and she won't float any at all. I knew they wouldn't no good come of your planning not to go to church to-morrow!"

"Get the boat over, McLean," says the captain, kind of husky. He took a squint around and spotted the fireman. "Serve out them life-preservers I bought in '98, and we'll see if they're any good!"

Cap'n Tom had the right idea, but it wasn't any use to him nor anybody else. Eddie Pecor had touched off the fireworks with his yell and his break for the boat. Four or five of the others had gone crazy along with him, and they clawed and slashed and fell over one another around the boat, so that McLean was as helpless as a baby. They tipped her off the cabin, and when she hit the main deck the bottom went out of her like cheese.

Biff had run aft while they was trying to get the boat down, but as soon as she busted he went back forward, in order not to see the way they acted, nor hear any more than he could help. The Myrtle was settling fast, going down by the head. Biff walked around a man that was praying out loud and stopped alongside of a big fellow who stood leaning over the rail and smoking a cigar. He had a set to his shoulders that made Biff take a shine to him as being an able-bodied citizen.

"How long have we got?" the man asked Biff. "I s'pose we better jump in plenty of time to get clear of the suction when she goes under."

"You're right and wrong, too," Biff told him. "We'd ought to jump this minute,

if it was even a month earlier; but the way it is now a man can't live in that water long enough to be picked up. I've been overboard this time of year. You can't keep alive. It stops your heart!"

"It don't seem possible," said the big man, "that we're going to pass on with land so close on both sides of us!"

"You won't, if you can swim a mile or so in ice-water," said Biff. "I'm as tough as they make 'em in these parts, but I can't do it."

"No chance of a boat coming along?"

"Not any at all! Navigation is about as good as stopped for the winter."

"Well!" The big man threw his cigar overboard, and it didn't have to go so very far to hit the water. "I'm damn glad I'm going out in good company, anyway!"

He jerked his shoulders back and reached out his hand. Biff shut down on it, and they took a long shake. Then the other man pulled a picture out of his coat pocket and handed it to Biff.

"Them's my kids," he said. "Guess I'll strip down, anyway, and keep afloat as long as I can."

IV

Just then Biff heard a hail. He looked up. Hunky Dawes had skittered up in the put-put. He stood off pretty well, about hailing distance.

Biff had forgot all about Hunky. Now he saw Betty Porter in the cockpit, and he wanted to live. Up to that time he hadn't cared so much one way or the other.

"Hey, Biff!" yelled Hunky. "You jump, and I'll circle in and pick you up. I can take one more on board!"

Betty Porter stood up and held out her arms to him.

"Jump, Jerry!" she said.

Biff put one leg over the rail. The world looked pretty good again. There was Betty Porter in the motor-boat, calling to him; but seeing her made him think of what she'd said the last time he'd talked with her.

"People are all one," she'd told him.

He remembered it just as he was going to vault over the side. Then he looked down, and saw he had the picture of the big man's youngsters in one hand. He didn't know exactly what was the matter with him, but he didn't feel like jumping. He slid back onto the deck.

Hunky had shut off his engine and was

drifting, taking a big chance with the swell, and also because Eddie Pecor and two of the passengers had gone in and was trying to swim out to him. Two was a load for Hunky's boat, and with three it would take mighty careful handling to keep her from filling.

"You take this feller side of me, Hunky!" yelled Biff. "He's got two young uns!"

Hunkey headed the put-put up to a swell, and then he begun to swear.

"Not by a damn sight!" he howled. "I'm risking a good boat, and I ain't going to do it for anybody but you. Jump or sink, you half-baked fool!"

"Come, Jerry!" Betty held out her arms again. "It will be all right, Jerry, if you'll jump! You know what I mean!"

He did know what she meant. There was the girl he wanted, waiting for him. It might not be right to take her, but he didn't have time to think about that then. He was busy thinking about something else.

"Why don't you jump?" the big man asked him. He had got his shoes and coat off, and was lighting another cigar. "You must be empty above the neck!"

The Myrtle was down by the head now, and they had to hang on to the rail to stand up.

"I want to, but I can't," Biff told him. "I'll be cussed if I'll crawl out of this scrape and leave the rest of you here!"

Just then the Myrtle gave a lurch and begun to settle fast.

"Go to hell!" yelled Hunkey.

He started the engine and headed north, with the three men in the water about half-way to him. Biff thought he might as well play it as game as the big fellow, so he kicked off his shoes and begun to peel down.

The Myrtle shivered and dived. Biff went under, swam hard, and after what seemed like a year he came up and turned over on his back. The chill got to him quick, and he knew that with the best luck in the world he didn't have over half an

hour to live. He looked around as well as he could, but there was nothing in sight—nothing and nobody except a camp-chair that came over one swell and disappeared with the next one.

It might have been five minutes later, or ten, maybe, when Biff saw what looked like a mess of weeds. He was too stiff to swim much, but he pushed toward it without thinking or trying very hard. Then the weeds moved and he saw a face, wet and twisted by the pain of the cold. It was Betty Porter, with her hair floating out around her and a white arm showing once in a while as she made a stroke.

She was about all in. She saw him; and after a minute they was floating side by side, blue and stiff and suffering.

"I jumped in, Jerry," she said. "I couldn't leave you!"

Biff groaned.

"I can't save you now," he said.

"Never mind!" she told him. "I've learned that you and I are the same kind of folks; and people that love each other—and can die together—are lucky!"

They didn't say anything more after that. They just lay shoulder to shoulder, getting nearer the end as the minutes dragged along, and dipping under once in a while as they got weaker.

Biff had made up his mind that the next dip would finish them, and he was glad of it, when a streak of fire raked along his side, stopped at his shirt collar, and snaked him through the water. He had grabbed Betty Porter without thinking, so that by the time he understood that the streak of fire was a boat-hook, Hunkey Dawes was hauling both of them over the stern of the put-put.

"This is twice I've risked my boat for you, Biff Hawkins!" yelled Hunkey, after he'd got them into the cock-pit and covered them up with all the clothes he could find and take off himself. "I thought the schoolma'am had some sense, but I guess she don't know any more than you do! You two better get married and pick on each other!"

OPPORTUNITY

THREE ways we have that lead—
One up, one down,
And on the third we go to seed!

Raymond S. Spears

The Dark Chapter*

A COMEDY OF CLASS DISTINCTIONS

By E. J. Rath

Author of "The Brains of the Family," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

XX

LATER, as they sat on the spring-board, studying their reflections in the pool, Marian told Rawlins about the Franklin Fielding fairy tale. He gripped her suddenly by the wrist, with a pressure that made her squirm.

"You told Hilda *that*?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly I did. Any reason why I shouldn't?"

"Oh, you little liar!"

"It isn't a lie, exactly," said Marian, trying to free her wrist. "It could be true. Now couldn't it?"

"But it *isn't* true."

"Well, then, what is true?"

Rawlins made no answer. He was still trying to grasp the colossal lie.

"If we don't know what's true," observed Marian, wiggling her feet in the water, "then anything can be true. You told us a lot of lies about yourself when you came here; but when you found out I knew they were lies, you wouldn't tell me anything else. Something's got to be true, and you might just as well be Franklin Fielding as anybody else."

He sat shaking his head slowly, not in negation so much as in amazement.

"And I wouldn't wonder if you are," added Marian, getting her wrist away from him.

"Well, I'm not," he said sharply.

"But you're somebody!"

"I'm not Franklin Fielding, and you damn well know it!"

Marian shrugged and stole a glance at him, wondering if he was getting angry. She had never seen him in a temper.

"Oh, all right!" she said. "If you say you're not, why, you're not, I suppose. I

was only trying to help you, and there isn't any need for you to get so fussed."

"Help me?"

"Certainly. Everybody's trying to make out who you are. Hilda's been wild with curiosity, particularly since you moved into the family. You can just bet she's got something to think about now!"

He marveled in silence.

"And I think it was a pretty good story, if I do say it," continued Marian. "I made you just as distinguished as I could. You didn't want me to make you out a dub, did you?"

"You didn't have to make me out anything at all."

"Oh, but I did! You just can't keep on being nobody, Wade. Of course, it's all right, so far as the neighbors are concerned. You're just our head-liner from the city. That's all they need to know; but we know better—or, rather, we don't even know that much. Hilda was just dying to find out something, so I fixed it up the best way I could."

Rawlins was in a studious moment.

"Well, you'll have to unfix it, Marian."

"Oh, I can't!"

"Then I will."

"No!" Marian was startled. "No, indeed you won't! You mustn't ever so much as hint that I told you. You see, it was supposed to be a secret I wormed out of you. You're not supposed to know I told Hilda, and Hilda is sworn never to say anything about it to you. You'll get me in an awful hole if you ever spill a single word of it!"

"How about me being in a hole?"

"Why, you're a celebrity now."

"Masquerading as the morbid Mr. Franklin Fielding?"

* Copyright, 1921, by E. J. Rath—This story began in the October (1921) number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

"Is he morbid?" asked Marian innocently. "I didn't know. He's famous, anyhow. What more do you want? If you won't be yourself, you ought to be willing to be somebody else."

"What makes you think I'm not myself?" he asked slowly.

She turned her head to study him, then glanced down at his image in the pool.

"I don't know, Wade; but if you think I'm going to waste my time asking you who you are, you're mistaken. You never tell. You'd better keep on being Franklin Fielding."

Rawlins shook his head.

"You've made your sister think I'm using the family for literary material. Do you think I'd do anything so rotten as that?"

"It wouldn't have to be rotten, would it? Couldn't you give us a good write-up?"

He smiled.

"Suppose I told the truth about you?" he suggested.

"I wouldn't speak to you."

"Exactly! Well, there's no need to worry. I never wrote a book, and I'm not going to write one. I'm—"

"What?"

"Never mind!"

Marian scowled at him.

"There!" she exclaimed. "That's just the reason I tried to make a somebody out of you. You won't speak for yourself."

"How are you going to square this with Hilda?" he asked.

"I—oh, let it stand for a while. What difference does it make? Besides, Wade, she's so excited over it that it's doing her an awful lot of good."

He shook his head.

"She'll think I'm a sneak, and she'll have a right to."

Marian made another observation of him.

"Seems to me you're getting rather particular about what Hilda thinks of you," she remarked.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked stubbornly.

"I'll tell you. It's just come to me. I'll tell Hilda that you were just lying to me!"

"Haven't you any morals at all?"

"But you told us *some* lies, Wade. You admitted that to me the first day. It won't hurt you to tell a few more. You don't expect *me* to admit that I'm a liar, do you?"

"I don't expect you to," he said pessimistically; "but it wouldn't do any harm, because you are one."

Marian made a little gesture that expressed confession and resignation.

"I'm not a piker, anyhow," she said. "You'd better keep on being Franklin Fielding for a while. Hilda's got a couple of his books. I'll get 'em for you, so you can bone up."

"I know all about his stuff. He's a pup!"

"Is he? Well, I'm sorry, Wade; but he was the best I could think of. I couldn't very well tell her you were Gertrude Atherton, could I?"

For answer, Rawlins placed his hand between her shoulders and suddenly sent her flying into the pool. Marian came up laughing and added a special grimace for his benefit. She took the ducking as a sign of forgiveness.

"Race you to the other end, Franklin Fielding!" she challenged.

He made a dive beneath her. With a startled squeal, she was off at a furious crawl.

Until he could come to a clearer view of his own plans, Rawlins decided to postpone a disclaimer of the mantle in which Marian Kilbourne had chosen to drape him. He was uncertain whether he could confine himself to the purpose that originally took him to Kilbourne Heights. Elements upon which he had not calculated, and which he could not possibly have foreseen, were developing a complex. Already his plans had undergone an involuntary expansion. It was not yet unpleasant, but the end was unknowable.

It was only too obvious that a change had come over Hilda. Rawlins observed it at their first meeting following the episode of Franklin Fielding. There was no chilling of her manner; if anything, there was a perceptible tinge of added warmth. There were flashes of actual graciousness, even when no other member of the family was present, and that was something new; but there was a deliberate, guarded caution beneath it all.

She spoke in a manner that was slow and careful, as if she were dictating to a stenographer and would not have an opportunity to revise. She smiled after a studied pattern. She chose the subjects about which she talked. She acted and spoke as if she were following the instructions of an

invisible director; and indeed there was such a director—herself.

For Hilda was not certain, and, with an unsolvable doubt in her mind, she was determined to be safe. When she rallied from the first shock of Marian's disclosure, and the edge of her anger and dismay cut less keenly, she examined the probabilities with much care.

Rawlins, of course, might have been lying, and Marian childishly credulous. She knew that he would not hesitate to lie if it served a purpose; but it was equally probable that he told the truth. Assuming it to be the truth, it explained almost everything. And as she weighed it all with as much precision as possible, and found herself unable to turn the balance decisively in either direction, she had no alternative but to guard every word and step with caution.

If he really were Franklin Fielding, it seemed to Hilda that the creation of a desirable impression might in some degree mitigate the awful consequences of his book about the Kilbourne family. If he had a book in mind, much damage had already been done; but there might yet be time to make repairs.

If he was surreptitiously analyzing her character, she did not think it fair to herself to supply him with poor material. If she was to be the heroine of a printed page, and if Franklin Fielding wrote only what he found and told the truth, however distressing, then at least she proposed to have a hand in shaping her fictional other self. If he were not Franklin Fielding—that being an even chance—then there was no harm in being nice to him.

There was more than that behind this subtle but obvious alteration in Hilda Kilbourne's policy. If he were not a writer of books, he was at least somebody. It was entirely probable that he was somebody more or less important. Even in the absence of her own opinion, which was rather definitely formed as to certain general phases of Wade Rawlins, there was the verdict of the neighborhood.

It did not seem possible that so many persons could be mistaken concerning him. There was singular unanimity on the point that he was not merely a gentleman of interest and charm, but a young man of mark. The neighbors courted him. Minnie Harlan courted him, and made very little concealment of it. Was there any reason why

Hilda— Well, she would not relinquish any rights or equities until his status had been definitely established.

Hilda was always attractive. There was a clean, keen directness about her that was appealing to people who liked character in their friends. When she made a point of it, she was alluring.

Rawlins discovered it. Even with all the studied caution of her manner, she could not hide the things that a gracious mood brought to light. Nor, of course, did she try. He did not find it difficult to separate the artificial from the natural, and to give the latter all the consideration that it deserved. As for the artificial, he knew why it was there.

It was distinctly an agreeable sensation to be stolen from a second tennis engagement with Miss Harlan, to be practically kidnaped in the blue roadster, and to be laughed at when his conscience forced him to remind her that he was already overdue at the Harlan courts.

"A house guest has 'his debts to pay,'" she remarked.

"But an engagement—"

"It never runs against the claims of the Kilbourne family."

"And will the Kilbourne family make my excuses for me?"

"Not this member, at any rate. Did we make your engagement?"

"I think," he said, "that somewhere there's a flaw in your logic. I shall discover it presently, no doubt."

"No doubt at all," she assured him. "I'm not particularly logical. Are you sure you wouldn't prefer to drive?"

"I couldn't trust myself. Duty would compel me to turn around."

Hilda laughed as he settled back in his seat.

"Of course," she said, "if you really have a New England conscience, if it's pricking you, if it's putting you to the torture—well, if it's as bad as that, I'll take you back myself."

Rawlins shook his head mournfully.

"I'm afraid it's too late. I may as well continue to be the victim of a plot."

"Are you interested in plots?" she asked, and straightway felt that she had put the suggestion too boldly.

"What kind of plots?" he countered, watching her.

"Why—any kind, almost."

"No, I can't say that I am."

Hilda chewed her lip, vexed at having faltered. It must have sounded very stupid to Franklin Fielding, probably even to Wade Rawlins.

"If you could specify a particular kind of plot," he added, "I could give you a better answer."

She spent a confused half-minute trying to recall the plot of "The Last Analysis," which some of the critics said was an epic novel, and which others declared was mush and milk. But she did not remember the plot; it seemed to her that the characters were just people, all quivering under the Fielding scalpel.

"I'm not plotty to-day," she confessed.

"I disagree," said Rawlins. "You plotted against Miss Harlan."

"Would you call that a plot?"

"Ask her."

Hilda smiled, and felt better. She had not realized that a plot might be very simple; but something warned her not to be incautious. He might not be Franklin Fielding, but there was always the chance. So she found another subject, and he made no demur about being led into it.

She was exceptionally nice to him, which meant that she was very nice indeed. They drove a long way through the countryside, without another mention of Minnie Harlan or anything else controversial. Once she was on the verge of trying to open the dark chapter again, but she shied away, for he might think it was a veiled allusion to literature.

They were back at Kilbourne Heights in time for lunch. As Hilda dismounted at the porch, he slid over into the driver's seat and headed the car toward the garage. Hilda paused on the top step to look after him, with perplexity written deeply on her face. He was so—

And then her reflections came to an end. From around the corner of the house appeared a woman. She was vivid, even at a distance. She was blond at any distance; and to Hilda Kilbourne she was a stranger.

The blue roadster slowed down and came to a halt, and the woman stepped from the lawn into the driveway. Rawlins leaned out from the seat. He was speaking to the stranger. Hilda watched with a new air of bewilderment.

Now the woman was talking, making swift gestures with a parasol. Rawlins interrupted; he was shaking his head. Then for a minute more there was dialog, but

Hilda could hear none of it. Gradually it lost its animation. The stranger laughed—Hilda caught that clearly.

Rawlins made a gesture, and with it he said something that was evidently compelling, for without further talk the woman stepped briskly into the car beside him. There was a puff of bluish smoke from the exhaust, and the roadster went off with a smooth purr—not in the direction of the garage, but toward the main road.

Hilda saw it vanish among the trees that bordered the winding drive. Then she seated herself on the top step and tried to think.

XXI

LATE in the afternoon—far too late for a walk that she had planned for Rawlins—Hilda saw her car returning. She was upstairs in her room, and she stood far enough back from the window to make certain he would not see her if he chanced to glance in that direction.

Long ago her mystification had given place to anger, and there was a dark look in her eyes as she watched him park the car in the roadway at the side of the house. Then he headed for the porch and passed out of her view.

Hastily she stepped in front of the mirror, gave her hair a touch, her nose a dab, then hurried into the hall. At the half-way landing on the staircase she encountered him.

"Oh, hello!" he said—and passed her without further speech.

It all came about so quickly that she was left dazed. Instead of halting him and making her demand for an accounting, as she had planned, she continued on her way down-stairs. There was an effrontery in his cheery smile and casual salutation that momentarily robbed her of all purpose.

Rawlins turned from the main hall into the wing that contained his own quarters, and walked on until he came to the end of the corridor. There was a door barring his way—not his own; but he opened it without knocking, crossed the threshold, and closed it behind him. He was in Kane Kilbourne's room.

Kane was writing at a desk. Before turning to identify the intruder he shoved a sheet of paper under the blotting-pad. Then, when he saw Rawlins, he looked both surprised and relieved.

"If that's to Annabelle," said Rawlins, "you'd better not mail it."

"Wha-what?"

Kane's expression of relief faded.

"That letter you were writing," said Rawlins. "The one you stuck under the pad. If it's to Annabelle, can it. If it's for somebody else, then it's none of my business."

"It's—how the devil is it any of your business, anyhow?"

Kane had become very pink in the cheeks, as he always did in the first moment of bluster.

"Because you're in bad with Annabelle, my son."

"Annabelle! What do you know about her?"

Rawlins sat down, helped himself to a cigaret, and lighted it.

"I've just spent most of the afternoon with Annabelle," he said.

There was nothing assumed in Kane's incredulity. He got to his feet slowly and stood staring.

"Didn't you know she was here?" asked Rawlins.

"Here? On this place?"

"Right on this place. Sit down, and don't get excited. She didn't meet the family; she was looking for you. When I found her she hadn't quite made up her mind to invade the house, although she was getting worked up to it."

Kane tried to whistle, but his lips were dry.

"Annabelle!" he muttered, with awe in his voice.

"She hired a car to drive her over from Merrill Beach," said Rawlins. "Brought it as far as the gates, paid off the driver, and came in afoot. She figured on you driving her back."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Kane.

"However, I happened to meet her, and I gave her a lift home again."

"Did—did anybody see her?"

"Hilda, I imagine; but they didn't meet."

Kane sagged back in his chair again and began wiping his forehead.

"I told her *never* to come here," he said in a complaining half whisper. "I told her never even to ring me on the phone. Gee, if the old man—"

"Well, she came," interrupted Rawlins. "Said you'd been neglecting her. How about it?"

"I—I was afraid to take Hilda's car again."

Rawlins accepted the explanation with a nod.

"But I was going over to-morrow," added Kane. "She didn't have to be in such a sweat about it."

"Better not go," advised Rawlins. "I don't think she loves you as much as she did. In fact—well, don't think that I mention it as a matter of prowess or pride, but Annabelle likes me."

Kane stared.

"I'm invited over to the beach; I'm actually expected. Annabelle's in a mood to be consoled."

"You're going—over to the beach?"

"I didn't say I was going, my son; I said I was expected. I'm welcome, if you can understand that. Annabelle has her good points. She speaks out whatever she thinks, which is a rather admirable trait. She spoke out quite a lot about you."

Kane flushed painfully and looked at his feet.

"She says you're engaged to her," added Rawlins.

Kane glanced up, frightened.

"Huh?"

"What's the matter? Aren't you?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"She wears a rather nice-looking stone—among others."

"But we're *not* engaged!" wailed Kane.

"Funny, then, that she got the idea! In most matters Annabelle seems to be a rather straight thinker."

"We're *not* engaged," repeated Kane doggedly.

"She certainly has that impression. You're not trying to run out on her, I hope?"

"I—I never said a word about marrying her."

"You're not snobbish about marrying into the chorus, are you?"

Kane stirred uneasily in his chair and stared at his feet again.

"She's not bad-looking," observed Rawlins. "Features, fairly regular. Good figure; but of course that's understood. Rather blonde, to be sure; uses blond hairpins. I searched the floor of the car before I got home, but she didn't lose any this trip. She ought to make a rather good wife for a young man with plenty of time and money. Why don't you marry her?"

"Oh, don't, Rawlins!"

But Rawlins did not appear to hear the plea, for he went on in a musing tone.

"Annabelle takes the situation quite seriously. In fact, when a young lady takes all the trouble to drive from Merrill Beach, more than forty miles from here, it shows that she's interested. Of course, it wasn't entirely to see you, Kane. She wanted to get a look at the layout. She'd heard quite a bit about Kilbourne Heights, and she wanted to know if it was really true. I think that shows good sense. She didn't want to jump out of the chorus into one of those bedroom, kitchenette, and bath affairs. She wanted to see for herself; and there's no doubt she has good taste, for she likes the place first-rate."

Kane was haggard.

"A girl with a practical mind," continued Rawlins, nodding his head. "She wanted to know how much your father was worth. I couldn't tell her, for I didn't know; but she could see, of course, that he wasn't exactly a piker. In fact, she said so, and I couldn't disagree with her. I don't mean to say that she's without sentiment. I'm certain she really thinks a lot of you, although she's a bit provoked because you've neglected her; but she doesn't lose sight of the practical side. Why, she even thinks I have money. That's a joke, of course; but she seemed so hopeful about it that I didn't have the heart to tell her the truth."

Kane staggered out of his chair and moved restlessly across the room.

"I'm—I'm a damned fool!" he said.

"Annabelle isn't," remarked Rawlins.

"What's she trying to do, anyhow? Did—did she talk about suing me?"

Rawlins laughed and shook his head.

"She's not so crude as that. And what would she sue you for? Aren't you going to marry her?"

"Do you think I'm crazy? Marry a chorus-girl!"

"Why not? There are duchesses who came out of the chorus."

"Oh, Rawlins, let up! Tell me what the devil I'm going to do."

Kane's voice was getting shaky, and, although he was quite pale now, his forehead was wet with perspiration.

"Why don't you give the family a chance to look her over? Maybe she'll make a hit," suggested Rawlins.

"I'm scared," blurted Kane. "What am I going to do, Rawlins?"

"I suppose you're going to keep on chasing her for a while longer. That's what

most of them do. Then some day she'll meet your father, and—"

Kane groaned. Suddenly Rawlins changed his manner.

"Are you ready to quit Annabelle?" he demanded.

"Lord, yes!"

"I thought so. You haven't got the right sort of nerve to play around with chorus-girls, my son. Well, if you're ready to quit, I'll see what I can do. You'd better begin by tearing up that letter. I don't care a hoot what's in it—tear it up. Have you written many to her?"

"Not—many."

"Letters contain any promises?"

Kane spent a brief period in thought, then shook his head.

"Very mushy?" asked Rawlins.

"No."

Kane made the denial in a flat tone that lacked emphasis.

"Well, perhaps something can be done about it. You don't deserve it. You ought to marry her. I suppose I'll have to go and see her again; she didn't tell me about the letters. I don't know why the devil I'm undertaking to do anything for you, but I'll try."

Rawlins did know, of course. It did not accord with his general plan to have a chorus lady marry into the Kilbourne family. He cared nothing about Kane. That youth deserved Annabelle, if anybody ever did; but there were others besides Kane, as there always are.

"You say Hilda saw her," said Kane suddenly. "What does she think?"

"I don't know," answered Rawlins, although he believed that he did. Having silently accepted responsibility for the blond hairpin, he was quite certain that Hilda would also credit him with the blonde.

"Maybe she thinks that you—" Kane paused hopefully.

"I dare say; but do you expect to pass the buck along to me every time?"

"You're fixed differently, Rawlins. It wouldn't hurt you particularly; but with me it would—"

"Kane, you're disgusting. Shut up!"

Kane saw that he meant it, and retreated into silence. Rawlins studied him coldly, then rose and walked toward the door.

"I don't know whether I can get you out of this or not," he said. "I'll see; but if I catch you fussing around Annabelle again, or writing any letters to her, or call-

ing her up on the phone, I'll lug you in before your father and mother, and—"

He ended the threat with a snap of his fingers which seemed to typify the extinction of Kane Kilbourne, and walked from the room. Kane sighed heavily, extracted the letter from its hiding-place under the blotting-pad, read it critically, and then tore it up.

"If Annabelle really started to fall for him, I'm sore," he muttered. "It was all right for him to take her away from here, but he ought to remember his place, confound him!"

As Rawlins emerged from the corridor that ended at Kane's room, he found Marian in the upper hall, perched recklessly on the banisters, with her feet hooked through to steady her.

"Hilda's furious," she volunteered.

"I dare say," he remarked. "I'm afraid I broke an engagement."

"It isn't the engagement. It's the fair-haired stranger."

"She saw, did she?"

"She sure did!"

"And told you?"

"Uhuh!"

"What did she say?"

"Oh, plenty," said Marian; "but that's not important. What are you going to tell Hilda?"

"I haven't decided yet. Anything to suggest?"

"Going to tell her about Kane?"

Rawlins's scrutiny was swift. There was something about Marian that often struck him as uncanny.

"What about Kane?" he asked.

Marian smiled wisely and met his scrutiny with a steady look.

"Or are you going to carry the blonde around on your own shoulders, Wade?" she inquired.

"I suppose it's a case of little pitchers having large ears," he said.

Marian shook her head.

"Nope! If you mean by that that I was listening at Kane's door, you're all wrong. I'm not quite as low as that, Wade; but I knew you were in Kane's room. You went straight there after you came in; you didn't even stop to explain anything to Hilda. She told me so. So it's easy enough to figure out that she wasn't your blonde at all. Hilda could figure it out, too, if she knew where you had been; but she doesn't. She's batting balls around the tennis-court.

Whenever she swings on them like Babe Ruth, you can tell she's mad. I followed you when you came into the house, and I made it my business to find out where you went; so it isn't worth while to lie to me. It's got something to do with Kane!"

"Some day you're going to know more than is quite good for you," said Rawlins solemnly.

"And some day," observed Marian, "you're going to try to pick up and carry more than you can get away with. What sort of a lady is she, Wade?"

"A wise one," he answered cautiously.

"Wiser than Kane, I'll bet! Is she very disreputable?"

"I don't know that she's disreputable at all."

Marian sighed.

"I thought it might be a regular scandal," she said; "particularly when I heard she was a long-distance blonde. Darn it! I wish I'd seen her. I'm always having rotten luck. What's her name?"

"I don't think we'd better talk about her."

"Well, you'd better be ready for Hilda," warned Marian.

"I'll go down and apologize now."

"I don't think you'll get very far with an apology, Wade Rawlins. You wouldn't with me, if I was in Hilda's place."

Rawlins laughed as Marian slid off the banisters with a peremptory nod of her head.

"What are you going to do—take her off Kane's hands?" she demanded.

"I haven't admitted that she's on his hands."

"You don't need to. I know. Well, be careful, Wade. You can't push things too far with Hilda. I'd hate to see you run off the place!"

"So would I," he admitted. "Did you say Hilda was on the tennis-court?"

"Uhuh! But don't cringe. If I were you, I wouldn't apologize at all," said Marian. "Treat 'em rough!"

She watched him as he went down-stairs, hanging over the banisters to see how he looked from a top view.

"Dog-gone it," she muttered. "If I was about five years older I'd make him step around! Well, now for Kane!"

She walked into Kane's room without ceremony, just as Rawlins had done, and found him standing at a window, staring sulkily at the Kilbourne landscape.

"Got any money, Kane?" she asked.

"Broke," he answered gloomily. "And you owe me five now."

"I thought I might make it ten. You may be broke, but I'm flat. All I need is five. You can let me have that, anyhow."

"I told you yesterday I wouldn't lend you another cent, and I won't."

He turned to the window again, as a sign that the interview was closed.

"But it's different to-day," said Marian sweetly. "Much different. Yesterday I was an ignorant girl, but to-day I'm a wise woman."

"There isn't five dollars' difference," he growled. "Go away and don't bother me!"

Marian curled her lip into a chilly smile, fluffed her hair, and sauntered deliberately across the room.

"Just because you are rude," she said, "and because you are stingy, I'm going to make it ten dollars instead of five, Kane Kilbourne!"

"Dream on," he remarked wearily.

"What shall I dream about—a beautiful blonde in a blue dress, with a lovely blue parasol?"

The drawling speech was still unfinished on her lips when Kane whirled about.

"A—what?"

"A beautiful blonde, wandering around Kilbourne Heights, looking for a gentleman," mused Marian.

He seized her by the shoulders, and for a second she thought he was going to be dangerous.

"If Rawlins told—" He stopped short and glared.

"But Rawlins didn't tell," said Marian. "Not a single word. I couldn't make him; he's very honorable. I can find out things without having people tell me. If you don't let go of my shoulders it may cost you fifteen!"

He let go, and stepped back a pace. His cheeks were fiery, and his eyes carried a look of consternation and despair.

"If you say anything to anybody I'll half murder you!" he blurted.

"I didn't say I was going to say anything. I only said I was going to borrow ten dollars."

She gave him a smile that was meant to convey sisterly affection, but to Kane it was a sinister grin. How much did she know, and what? And if Rawlins did not tell her, how did she find out? Confound it, this was blackmail! But if she *did* tell—

He found that his palms had suddenly become moist.

"I—I haven't got ten dollars," he said.

"Search," she suggested.

"I'll lend you five."

"Ten!"

He was fumbling clumsily in a pocket.

"If you'll promise not to—"

"Ten dollars!" said Marian.

"It's almost every cent I've got," he complained. "Aw, have a heart!"

Marian reached for the money and backed off toward the door.

"Remember, I'm only borrowing five, Kane. The other five is a fine for being nasty about it!"

XXII

HILDA KILBOURNE did not always run true to the form that was expected of her. She could be a creature of quixotic surprises, and when Rawlins found her on the tennis-court she elected to surprise him. The smile she gave him had more than mere warmth; it had radiance.

"Take a racket," she said. "We've easily time for a set before dinner."

He picked up a racket that lay on a bench and went to his place, where she fed him with a smashing service that kept him on his toes. Not a word about the disappearance of her car for an afternoon; not a word about Annabelle; not a hint of reproach in look or gesture. She laughed at him when he missed a hard drive; she laughed at herself when he placed a quick return beyond her reach. She played as if thrilling with the exuberance of life.

Rawlins was puzzled. If she was saving it for another time, he marveled at her gift for dissembling. If she had forgotten—but that was impossible. If she did not care, then he was disappointed and somewhat troubled. He had no hunger for angry argument, but he hoped that she was at least annoyed.

The things that he could not reconcile were Marian's report and Hilda's bearing toward him. The latter put him in a suspicious mood. He met her with an apology on his lips, but it remained unspoken, and now he had no idea what he should do with it. So he played tennis to the best of his form, but it was none too good, for she beat him readily enough.

As they walked toward the house, she linked an arm through his—a thing utterly unlike Hilda in her normal moods—and

began a conversation that dealt with the trouble Grosvenor was having with his dignity.

"He's having a soul struggle," she explained. "His principles tell him he must give notice, but his curiosity tells him to wait. He wants to see what's going to happen to you!"

"And has he any idea?" asked Rawlins cautiously.

"Nothing definite, so far as we can find out."

"Has anybody?"

"Oh, there are various theories, of course," said Hilda.

"Such as—"

"I'm afraid they're too fantastic, Wade. You'd laugh at them; and I've no doubt they're all wrong."

"What's your theory, for instance?"

Hilda glanced sidewise and shook her head.

"It's a dark chapter," she said. "Or perhaps I should say 'opaque.'"

"So that it's difficult to read, I imagine?" he suggested.

"For those who have poor eyesight."

Rawlins laughed, to cover the curiosity she had stirred in him. She was baffling this afternoon; she had chosen the unexpected course. He did not understand why he had escaped crushing anger or why she reverted to the matter of dark chapters, with Grosvenor as an index line. It all made him somewhat uneasy.

"I should like to hear you read that chapter," he said casually. "For that purpose I'm not only willing to concede that you have good eyesight, but I'll even grant you clairvoyance."

They had reached the porch.

"Some time," she said, "I may try to read it for you. If I don't see everything clearly, perhaps you can help me; but now I must change for dinner."

Thus she left him unsatisfied. He did not see her again until the family gathered at the table. After dinner he tried to get an explanation from Marian, but found that she had no helpful ideas.

"Only thing I can suggest," said Marian, "is to watch your step. It's not natural of Hilda to be sweet to you, after what happened. I never knew her to give anybody a chance at the other cheek."

He had no opportunity to talk to Hilda, and presently he found himself following in the wake of Mr. Kilbourne, who had

been making suggestive signs. When the lord of Kilbourne Heights had taken him to a safe distance, he wasted no preliminaries in getting to the point.

"Bad business, losing a chauffeur," he said. "One of those private intervals in the lives of great men is at hand. How do I get there—what?"

Rawlins devoted an instant to reflection.

"Don't see how I can get away," he said. "I've promised to show Mrs. Kilbourne something about bridge."

"Awful waste of women's time!" growled Mr. Kilbourne. "Makes gamblers out of them. But how do I get to this little game?"

"I might be able to find you a driver."

"Discreet?"

"Yes, I think he'd be discreet."

"He's got to be," said Mr. Kilbourne emphatically.

"Discretion is largely a matter of money, you understand."

Mr. Kilbourne shoved a hand into a pocket and presently thumbed a bill from a roll.

"Give him that, and tell him he can have another if he keeps his mouth shut," he said. "All he needs to know is where I'm going, not why."

"I'll see what I can do, sir."

"I wish you'd do it yourself," grumbled Mr. Kilbourne.

"Sorry! I'll let you know in a little while."

"All right! You'll find me somewhere on the porch."

Half an hour later Rawlins found him, and they fell into a whispered talk.

"You say you've got a man—who is he?" demanded Mr. Kilbourne.

"I'm not at liberty to say. He doesn't want to be known—afraid he'll get into some trouble with his employer; but you needn't worry about him. He's a good driver."

"Sounds fishy, Rawlins; but I'll take your word."

"Thanks! I've told him where to take you, and to wait until you're ready to come back. He's ready any time you want to start."

"Where?"

"The car's down near the garage, without lights. I'll show you."

"Where's Emily?" inquired Mr. Kilbourne, with a cautious glance along the porch.

"She's in the library, talking to your daughters."

"Where's Kane?"

"He went out somewhere."

"They never stay home," muttered Mr. Kilbourne. "Well, all right! Sneak a hat and overcoat out to me here. You'll find plenty in the closet under the staircase. Then show me the car. When you see Mrs. Kilbourne, tell her I went up-stairs. Understand? I was going to bed—had a headache, and didn't want to be disturbed, even if anybody telephoned."

When Rawlins returned with a hat and overcoat, Mr. Kilbourne slid over the porch railing with a facility that did credit to his years. Rawlins followed. As they went away through the darkness, the head of the establishment trod with the circumspection of a cat crossing a muddy road.

"There's no need to ask any questions of this driver, or give him any directions," said Rawlins in a low voice. "He understands what he's to do, and he's paid."

"I've a hunch I'm going to lose," complained Mr. Kilbourne.

"Why go, then?"

"To see if I can beat the hunch. Where's the car?"

"S-sh! We're coming to it. And don't worry about the driver. He doesn't even know who you are. For to-night, he's merely an automaton."

"Show me this rare bird," grunted Mr. Kilbourne.

The rare bird was huddled in the front seat of the touring-car. He did not turn his head as the passenger arrived, under guidance of Rawlins. All that Mr. Kilbourne could see was a uniform, a cap, and a pair of goggles.

"Anything weak about his eyes?" he demanded, as Rawlins pushed him into the tonneau.

"He's an owl," said Rawlins.

Closing the door behind the passenger, Rawlins stepped to the front of the car, whispered something to the driver, and was answered with a nod. There was a cautious meshing of gears, and the car moved off into the darkness.

Rawlins turned toward the house. He wanted to isolate Hilda, if it proved possible, and probe further into the matter of the unread chapter. Teaching bridge to Mrs. Kilbourne did not allure him.

The touring-car was driven without lights until it was clear of Kilbourne Heights;

then the driver threw the switch on the dash, and the road was lifted from darkness into a concentrated white glare.

Mr. Kilbourne sat huddled in the back seat, smoking. All he had was a silhouette of the driver's head, and it did not particularly interest him. He was content to play the game according to the rules prescribed by Rawlins. Great men did not bother their heads about details. He wanted to miss the first pot, which was unlucky, but he did not care to be tardy beyond that point.

The driver in goggles knew his business. He went ten miles down the road and turned in at the right place, and he did it without jarring his passenger's nerves or wasting unnecessary minutes.

As Mr. Kilbourne climbed out of the car, he tossed a handful of cigars into the front seat.

"Nothing for you to do but wait," he said tersely.

The driver touched his cap, and the car pulled away into the darkness. It paused under the trees a short distance from the house and waited until the figure of Mr. Kilbourne, outlined for an instant against a rectangle of yellow light, disappeared behind a closed door. Then the car moved on again into the main road.

A quarter of a mile distant it paused, and Kane Kilbourne removed his goggles. He glanced at the clock on the instrument-board. Then he fumbled in a side pocket for a flash-lamp, climbed out into the road, went around to the rear, and took a reading from the gasoline gauge.

"Plenty of time and plenty of gas," he commented. "Hanged if I'm going to stick around four or five hours, waiting for the old man to get through with his fool game! He'll never know the difference, and neither will Rawlins."

When the car was in motion again he hastened the pace, settling down into the driver's seat and concentrating his gaze on the road. Kane was a good driver, and he knew the road; but he was not driving in the direction of Kilbourne Heights.

More than an hour passed. Two villages and one considerable town had been left behind him. Presently there came to Kane's nostrils an unmistakable saltiness in the air, and soon to his eyes a glimpse of lights across a flattened plain that dipped gently away from him.

"A hop at the hotel, I suppose," he mut-

tered. "And me in this uniform! I'll have to send in for her."

Merrill Beach was maintaining its reputation for the life that is advertised to rejuvenate. There did not seem to be a dark room in the big hotel. As Kane parked the car in the rear he could hear the jazz orchestra above the shuffle of feet on the veranda. Beyond, on the board walk, there were couples in leisurely patrol, their figures outlined against a dark sea. Everything was normal.

"Decently and like a gentleman," Kane had been repeating to himself for an hour past. As he stood wondering whether Annabelle was on the veranda or the board walk, he said it again.

"I'm not going to have her think that I'm bossed by anybody," he muttered. "If I'm going to cut loose, I do it on my own account. A man's got to keep his self-respect!"

He skirted the corner of the hotel and waited near the end of the veranda until he intercepted a bell-hop who was on somebody else's errand. It so happened that the youth knew Annabelle; all of them did. For half a dollar he undertook to convey a message, and went away with nearly every cent that Kane had.

The latter went back to the car and waited; it might embarrass Annabelle to be seen chatting with a chauffeur.

After an interval she found him. There was a look in her eyes that disturbed him. He knew that Annabelle had a temper, but this was a look that conveyed something different—a sort of premeditated purpose that she was in no haste to reveal.

"Why the make-up?" she demanded. "Is it a character part?"

It was not the greeting he had expected, but it opened the path for an explanation, and he made it at length, hurrying along nervously.

"So after I parked the old man," he said, "I came to see you. Only chance I had."

"That so?" said Annabelle. "How come you passed me up when I was over to your place?"

Kane made an expressive gesture.

"You hadn't any right to come over, Annabelle. I told you that a lot of times."

"Ashamed of me—is that the idea?"

"N-no," he protested.

"Ever tell the family about me?"

"Why—no."

"You bet you haven't!" said Annabelle. "And say, who's the live one that drove me back here in the car?"

"He's a friend," answered Kane cautiously; "but he hadn't any right to butt in. I didn't tell him to."

"Is he rich?"

"I—I don't know."

Annabelle spent a few seconds in thought.

"Well, you're not going to get anywhere with me by passing the buck to your friends," she remarked. "I don't care how classy they are. What are you trying to do—give me the gate?"

She put it more bluntly than Kane would have done, but he felt that he must not lose the opportunity. He was still thinking of the family.

"I've had a sort of feeling we're not suited to each other," he said slowly. "Now don't get me wrong, Annabelle. You know what I mean. I just feel—"

"Oh, you do, eh? And how do you suppose I feel?"

"I thought maybe you felt the same way."

"Do I look simple, or absent-minded, or anything like that?"

"Why, no—of course not. Only—well, the family wouldn't think I was old enough—"

He faltered suddenly, feeling that he had narrowly missed tripping himself.

"What's the idea? Am I supposed to be a century-plant?" she demanded. "Maybe I'm older than you are, but I've got a lot more speed!"

"You're—you're all right," he said weakly.

"Except when it comes to the family. Then I'm canned. I suppose you think you can pick me up and drop me any time, like I was a newspaper somebody left in a trolley-car!"

It would have been easier if she ranted, he felt; but Annabelle, although she spoke with a certain brutal directness, was keeping a grip on herself, and that was disconcerting to Kane.

"You don't understand, Annabelle," he said. "So far as I'm concerned it's all right; but I've got to think about other people."

"Well, I have to think about Annabelle. How do you know I wouldn't make a hit with the family?"

"Well, it isn't that, exactly. We're just not suited, that's all."

"Temperament stuff, eh?" mused Annabelle. "That doesn't listen straight. What are you losing, anyhow—your affectionate disposition or your nerve?"

Kane did not answer. He was thinking about the family at Kilbourne Heights. Annabelle's thoughts were also at Kilbourne Heights, but they did not concern the family. The house, the estate, all the material things that reflected the Kilbourne fortune, made a vivid picture in her mind.

In her own fashion, she was wise. She recognized a situation when she met it. If she had an instinct for locating the Achilles heel, it had been a development from necessity. She knew when she was being "kissed off," and she thought she knew how to make the counter play.

"So I'm being jilted—is that it?" she demanded.

"Jilted?" he echoed in consternation. "Why, Annabelle, we haven't ever been engaged."

"Just one of those beautiful friendships, I suppose?"

Kane nodded. At the moment he could not think of anything that described it more delicately.

"I've got letters of yours," she observed thoughtfully.

"Annabelle!"

"Well, there isn't any argument about it, is there?"

"But you wouldn't—"

His voice faded away into a mumble. Whatever Annabelle would or wouldn't, she kept it to herself.

"I'm thirsty," she said suddenly. "Been dancing. Go get me a drink of water. I want to think, anyhow. I'll sit here."

She climbed into the car and pulled her wrap closer around her bare shoulders.

Kane, glad of the respite, moved off in the direction of the hotel. He would not return with the drink of water until he had thought it all out. Annabelle disconcerted him. She was bluffing, of course; but he did not get any enjoyment out of it. He almost wished that he had taken Rawlins's advice and left everything in his hands.

Twenty paces distant from the car his ear caught a familiar sound, and he turned to look back. Annabelle had started the motor and was leaning forward toward the gear-lever.

"Annabelle!" he cried.

Then he sprinted; but he was too late by yards. The big Kilbourne car was

under way, and by the time she had it in second speed it was outpacing him. Annabelle waved her hand over her shoulder, but did not look back.

XXIII

ANNABELLE drove like a woman who knew exactly where she was going, and why. It was also quite plain that she was a girl who had formed the useful habit of learning how to drive almost anything that had a steering-wheel and an accelerator. Her evenings had been filled with plenty of practise on a variety of makes. Concerning service and emergency brakes her knowledge was not so broad and inclusive; but as she did not use them much, that was not an important point.

Several times she had been over the road by daylight, for most of its distance, so that she went on her way with confidence as well as expedition. Snuggling her wrap about her, she found it necessary to employ one hand in holding it; but that gave her no serious inconvenience, for the Kilbourne car had a sensitive wheel, despite its bulk.

The villages and the town saw very little of Annabelle, for she did not linger by the way. So far as the motor-cycle police were concerned, she played in admirable luck, for she never knew even the thrill of pursuit. In fact, it was all rather tame, except for the pace; but Annabelle's mind was too busy to worry about such a shortcoming as that.

"He'll tie a can to me, will he?" she kept asking herself. And then, answering her own question: "Wait till I get through with that outfit. I'll show 'em whether I've got any rights!"

She remembered very well the place that Kane spoke about. There were two stone lions on either side of a gateway. She had observed them only that afternoon, although then they possessed no significance beyond a venture in art. The lions were not difficult to locate, for the lenses of the road-lights cast a wide cone of radiance, and Annabelle had sharp eyes.

She turned in between the couchant stone cats and drove cautiously along a roadway that led to the dark bulk of a house. There were two other cars parked in the gloom, and she discerned the figures of sleeping drivers. Annabelle was not certain just where the Kilbourne car was expected to be, so she took the precaution of moving it close to the front door.

Two windows on the second floor seemed to be the only visible spots of cheer; the lower part of the house was somber. She glanced at the clock on the dash, then switched off her lights. Kane had left the chauffeur's cap on the seat, and she pulled it over her sheaf of blond hair, taking care to tuck straying locks underneath it.

In reaching for the cap she also found the goggles. She put them in her lap, where they would be ready to hand, and then settled herself to wait.

On another occasion Annabelle might have found waiting a sleepy task, but her mind was so active to-night that she remained awake without effort. So busily did she apply herself to the business of thinking that she took no note of the time, so that when she heard footsteps and voices on the other side of the front door she could have given no approximate estimate of the period of waiting. Slipping the goggles into place, she bent down behind the wheel, started the motor, and waited.

The house door opened and three gentlemen emerged. In the center of the group was Henry Kilbourne, wearing a pleased expression.

"There's your car now, you old second-story worker!" observed the gentleman on Mr. Kilbourne's left. "We'll see you aboard."

Mr. Kilbourne stiffened his figure. Deliberately he brushed off the kindly hands, as a man would flick particles of dust from his coat-sleeves.

"Make it myself," he said solemnly. "Watch!"

So the other two gentlemen leaned against the porch pillars and watched, while he made a stately descent of the steps, crossed a few yards of roadway, and reached the side of his car. Steadying himself with a hand on the door, he turned and bowed to the watchers.

"Make it all right?" he demanded.

They answered him with applause. Bowing again, Mr. Kilbourne mounted carefully into the car, closed the door behind him, and lowered himself into the seat.

"James, home!" he commanded.

As the car began to move, he suddenly reached forward and punched the driver between the shoulders with a heavy forefinger. There was a stifled exclamation.

"Stop the car!" ordered Mr. Kilbourne. "Stop the car! Got to start out right. Made a lil mistake."

The car halted.

"Lemme see," mused the owner. "No hurry—lemme think. James, home. Nope—got it wrong again. Mus' get it right. Bad luck if I don't get it right. Got to get it right all by myself. Lemme think!"

He rested his forehead in the palms of his hands, while the watchers on the porch still kept vigil. Suddenly he roused himself and made an eloquent gesture of triumph.

"Home, James!" he cried.

There was a cheer from the porch as the Kilbourne car disappeared into the night.

Mr. Kilbourne settled back in the seat, put a cigar in his mouth, and used twelve matches in lighting it. He was marvelously patient through the ordeal, which lasted for more than a mile.

Annabelle, now that she had him, was not quite certain what she wanted to do with him. She headed in the direction of Kilbourne Heights, but drove at a moderate pace, in order to readjust her plans. She had not calculated on the contingency presented by Mr. Kilbourne's exalted state of happiness.

That gentleman, however, was obviously in no haste. He was in a reflective mood, and his thoughts were pleasant, so he voiced them.

"Mos' surprising thing in world! Had a bad hunch going; got a bank-roll coming. Busted hunch wide open. Busted hunch, cleaned bunch—tha's poetry. Tha's the way I feel—all full of poetry. Don't know how you feel, driver, but I know how I feel. I feel like the mornin' star of glory had busted inside me. Goin' to make a lil present!"

He delved into a pocket, stripped a bill, tossed it into the front seat, and gave Annabelle an earnest blow on the back. She winced and crouched lower, scowling and biting her lip, but she did not turn.

"I'm mos' generous of men," observed Mr. Kilbourne. "Like to see everybody happy. Like to see family happy. Make lots of money; good provider. Got nice wife; nice daughters; nice son. Got lot of nice servants. Got nice house; nice garage. Got nice disposition, too. Have 'nother lil present!"

He wadded a second bill into a ball, aimed it so that it landed at the driver's feet, and playfully punched Annabelle on the shoulder, putting into it all the enthusiasm of a genial nature.

Annabelle screamed. The car swerved, then came to a stop. Mr. Kilbourne braced his feet, opened his mouth, and stared. The chauffeur's cap was flung aside with an angry hand, and the goggles followed it. A blond head turned, and, as the cloak slipped, a bare shoulder gleamed in the light of the dash lamps.

"Say, you old geezer!" she cried. "If you hand me another wallop in the back I'll sue you for a million!"

"S a woman!" gasped Mr. Kilbourne.

Annabelle's shoulder really ached. As she sat twisted in her seat, glaring at him, she began rubbing it vigorously.

"You can bet your whole bank-roll it's a woman!" she snapped. "You can bet another one that it's a lady, too! And if I've got anything the matter with my shoulder, you'll pay lady-size damages. What do you think I am—your sparring partner? Wake up—your wife's home!"

Mr. Kilbourne was not too dazed to remember that he ought to take off his hat, which he did.

"S a young lady," he muttered to himself. "Now, where the—"

"And I've got a black and blue spot right in the middle of my back now," said Annabelle. "Look!"

She stripped aside the cloak, and Mr. Kilbourne found himself staring at a smooth, white expanse.

"Mos' humble apology," he said. "Firs' time ever hit a woman in my life. Very sorry—thousand apologies!"

He started to explore the back with a cautious finger, but Annabelle, with the strength of an indignant woman, pushed him roughly into his seat.

"Keep your hands off me, you old souse! I'm going to get that back photographed for a jury. I'm going to sue you for beating me up. What do you think you can get away with, anyhow?"

Mr. Kilbourne reflected for several seconds, and slowly realized that there was something strange and incongruous in his home-coming.

"Didn't know Rawlins got lady driver," he said. "Got to speak to him about it. Hadn' any business keepin' lady out so late." He stared at Annabelle's white shoulders again. "Lady driver all dressed up for party. Very sorry, lady. Wha's your name?"

"You'll know my name fast enough," said Annabelle. "You'll know it when my

lawyer gets good and ready. Now you stay where you are in that back seat, and if you land another punch on me I'll climb over there and make you cry!"

Annabelle's shoulder still ached, but she was glad, for it had given her an entirely new idea. The project that had been in her mind when she left Merrill Beach was now wholly discarded. She scarcely remembered that such a person as Kane Kilbourne existed. Henry Kilbourne was an immeasurably more important individual—not because he had a son, but entirely on his own account.

It seemed to Annabelle that everything was very much simplified. Allowances may always be made for the heirs of great men, but the great men themselves receive no such indulgences from a critical and cynical world. Henry Kilbourne at three o'clock in the morning, driving the highways with a lady at the wheel, was an asset whose value might reach princely proportions.

She started the car again.

"Hey! Where we goin'?" demanded Mr. Kilbourne.

"Home, James!" was what Annabelle flung back over her shoulder.

Mr. Kilbourne began to visualize with alarming clearness.

"Lissen," he commanded, leaning forward. "Can't go home this way. Can't go home with lady driver. Got nice family; wouldn't understand."

"It ain't up to me to worry about your family," retorted Annabelle. "You stick in that back seat. If you come near me again I'll hit you with a wrench!"

"Can't go home," repeated Mr. Kilbourne stubbornly. "Everybody wake up. Everybody get excited. Everybody lose nice sleep."

Annabelle laughed theatrically.

"I'll make a little bet they're going to wake up," she remarked. "You don't think I'm going to go sneaking into anybody's place, do you? No chance! When I go in, the band plays!"

She jammed her foot on the accelerator, and the car leaped. Mr. Kilbourne, who had been considering the alternative of walking the rest of the way, fell back into the seat and realized that he was not yet willing to sacrifice his life for the quiet of the family.

"And to think that I was fussing around with a piker like Kane!" muttered Annabelle happily.

"Got to stop car," commanded Mr. Kilbourne. "Lemme get out!"

Her answer was another thrust on the gas-pedal. Annabelle was not minded to lose a prize. While she drove carefully, she also drove rapidly enough to make sure that he would remain in the back seat.

"Lemme get out!" repeated Mr. Kilbourne, in an excited wail.

"You stay in that seat," she warned him. "If you try to get out you'll slide half a mile on your ear!"

"Then lemme out at the gate."

"I'll let you out when I get you where I want you, old bank-roll. You stick with me and you'll see something!"

Mr. Kilbourne was endeavoring to invent a more effective appeal, when the car turned in at Kilbourne Heights. He collapsed weakly as he recognized the familiar gate-posts.

"Turn off lights," he faltered.

Annabelle's answer was to reach for the switch that controlled the spot-light, which added its glare to that of the big road-lamps. Glittering like a Coney Island excursion steamer, the Kilbourne car rolled swiftly along the road that wound among the trees and at last burst into the open space that lay in front of the house. Annabelle stopped it directly in front of the porch, with a purposeful abruptness that brought a shriek from the brake-drums.

Standing erect in her place, she began playing the spot-light along the second story of the darkened house. At the same time she pressed her thumb firmly on the button that operated the siren, and held it there. There was a raucous, steady blare from beneath the hood, and as it tore the silence into shreds the spot-light's dazzling and merciless beam began hopping from window to window.

But even this did not exhaust Annabelle's ingenuity. She had a fairly powerful soprano, and she pitched it high, in a weird, wordless wail, so that it rose above the voice of the horn.

Mr. Kilbourne began to shudder himself into a state of sobriety.

"Sh-h-h-h!" he pleaded huskily.

Annabelle refilled her lungs and wailed again, in a still higher key. Mr. Kilbourne, standing in the car, clasped his hands, groaned, and glanced upward toward the second-story windows.

"Shut up!" he begged. "Don't raise so much hell. Here's some money!"

He thrust a hand into his pocket and brought it forth well filled; but Annabelle, seeing a vision of greater things, spurned it.

A light appeared in a window at the corner of the house. That was Hilda. A second later there was another light. That was Marian. Mr. Kilbourne held his breath to see whether a third light would appear. He knew exactly where to look for Mrs. Kilbourne's room.

The lights inspired Annabelle.

"I'm being insulted!" she shrieked. "Anybody going to help me? There's an old souse down here, and—"

Mr. Kilbourne reached forward and placed a hand over her mouth. A second later he collapsed into the seat, flung there by a thrust from Annabelle's able arm.

"He struck me!" she wailed. "Don't I get any help at all? Ain't there a man around anywhere that 'll protect me? O-o-h-h-h!"

She did not forget to keep the horn in play while she made use of her voice.

"I want protection!" cried Annabelle.

"I want my rights!"

Mr. Kilbourne was steadily saying "Sh-h-h," but nobody could have heard it a yard away. Certainly Annabelle did not hear it, nor would it have impressed her if she had heard. She was playing a big game according to her own idea of rules and strategy.

Now there was a light in the upper hall, and a sound of swift footsteps. Now a light in the lower hall. Then the porch light flashed and the front door opened. A tall figure in a purple silk dressing-gown appeared.

"I want my rights!" shrieked Annabelle.

The tall figure crossed the porch in two strides, descended the steps, and moved swiftly to the side of the car. Reaching in, Rawlins grasped Annabelle by one of her white arms and flung her roughly into the seat. It produced the double effect of stilling the horn and checking her outcry.

Holding Annabelle in her place, Rawlins opened the tonneau door with the other hand and reached for Mr. Kilbourne.

"Hustle out!" he commanded in a low voice.

Mr. Kilbourne hustled as well as he could, but when he got as far as the porch he sank wearily on the lower step.

"I want—"

Annabelle found herself shaken so roughly that her voice trailed off in a gasp.

"Shut up!" said Rawlins quietly.

There was a note in his voice that seemed to master her. Leaning toward him, she peered into his face.

"Oh, it's you!" she said, and did not seem to be entirely displeased.

"Where's Kane?" he whispered.

Annabelle laughed.

"I parked the baby over at the beach and went after a live one. Did you hear me bawling the old bird? Did I do it good? Say, what do I get out of it?"

Rawlins could hear footfalls on the staircase within the house.

"Beat it!" he said sharply.

"Who—me?" Annabelle began, bridleing. "After all the trouble I've had?"

"Hurry up!"

"I'm going to get my rights," she said sullenly. "Gee! I wanted you for one of my witnesses. I thought you were my friend. I didn't expect—"

He pinched her arm impressively, and she was silent again. Somehow Annabelle did not have the courage to fight.

"Take the car and get out of here," he said in a warning tone. "I don't care what you do with the car. Keep it, if you like. Whose money is this?"

He picked up a roll that lay on the seat.

"That's his," said Annabelle, eyeing it with interest.

"Keep that, too; and keep your mouth shut until you get clear of the house."

"I'm going to get a lawyer," she complained, as her fingers closed on the money.

"And he'll get the roll. Now beat it!"

Annabelle devoted a brief instant to thought, made a final study of Rawlins's face, and slid over behind the steering-wheel. The Kilbourne car moved away.

Rawlins went over to the steps, dragged the terrified one to his feet, and marched him into the house.

Mr. Kilbourne's head drooped forward. His legs functioned, but his mind seemed to be in a stupor. He did not see Hilda, standing near the foot of the staircase, a lovely figure in pink. He did not see Marian, hovering near the head of the staircase, a ghostly figure in white. Nor did he observe a group of servants, headed by Grosvenor, who huddled in the rear of the upper hall and went shuffling off at a scowl and a gesture from Rawlins.

The lord of Kilbourne Heights was happily ignorant of espionage. He was only conscious of the firm and authoritative

guidance of Rawlins, who led him to his room and put him to bed.

XXIV

DAWN, which was standing hesitant on the threshold of the day as Rawlins went back to his room, was a welcome visitor. He had no further desire for sleep. For a while he sat by the window, watching the odd tricks of light that signaled the coming of the sun; but his mind was not engaged with the phenomena of a morning in the making. People and their doings concerned him, and not the least important of the group was himself.

Seldom did Wade Rawlins spend time in chiding Wade Rawlins. He regarded it as an unprofitable occupation; but the criticism crept in, despite his rule.

"Should have driven him myself," he muttered. "I might have known I couldn't trust the idiot; but Hilda spoiled it. She was challenging me on the dark chapter, and I was weak enough to stay. And what good did it do me? I got nothing out of her. I'm not even sure that she had anything. Marian's right, I think—when Hilda is sweet to you, watch your step!"

The sun was tinting the tree-tops when he got up from his place at the window and exchanged his pajamas for a bathing-suit. Slipping a pair of shoes on his feet and swathing himself in a bath-robe, he left his room and went down-stairs. For five minutes or so he dog-trotted over the dew-glistened grass, until his blood was racing, then headed for the pool.

As he neared it, sounds from beyond the evergreen hedge told him that he was not the first arrival. Probably Marian, he thought; nearly always she was the early one.

But it was Hilda. She had just emerged from the shining water, and was standing on the marble coping, a dripping Diana in a one-piece suit. They sighted each other at the same instant. Rawlins was unprepared for a meeting, but there was no hesitation in his step as he walked toward her.

"Water chilly?" he asked.

There was an unspoken inquiry in the scrutiny she gave him. She seemed uncertain about giving it voice.

"No, the water is not at all chilly," she answered.

Then he knew that the chill was elsewhere; but he smiled as he kicked off his shoes and tossed the bath-robe on a bench.

Hilda was already moving toward the diving-platform. A fine, lithe young Amazon he found her—a grown-up Marian. This was their first meeting at the pool.

If Hilda was conscious of his eyes, she masked the feeling completely. It did not disturb her as she balanced herself on the edge of the upper platform, lifted her arms, and slowly filled her lungs. Her body left the platform in a long descending curve and entered the water almost as cleanly as the dive of an otter.

Rawlins climbed the platform and followed her. For several minutes they churned the pool, passing and repassing, but without speech or a meeting of glances. All that Rawlins discovered in this period was that Hilda had a better stroke than Marian, and a turn of speed that might have kept him busy had he challenged it.

Presently, when she was comfortably breathless, she climbed the ladder, sought a woolly robe that lay near the edge of the pool, and enveloped herself. He thought she was going back to the house without further notice of him, but she surprised him by a beckoning gesture.

When he joined her she was sitting on a bench, twisting a rubber bathing-cap in her fingers.

"Please sit down," she said.

Rawlins obeyed.

"Now tell me everything, Wade."

By this time he had prepared himself. If he did not tell her everything, he told much. He felt that it was safer to explain certain things of which she had the knowledge that comes from seeing and hearing, but lacked a full understanding. Hilda nodded from time to time as he spoke. Her face was thoughtful; she gave no hint of indignation.

"Of course," she said, "I knew that father played poker. It's nothing to me, and he can afford it; but mother is opposed to it. On her account I am grateful for the fact that she is a heavy sleeper. She never waked up. I looked into her room and made sure of it."

"That helps, of course," he remarked.

"It will save her a great deal of pain and worry," said Hilda, nodding. "It was the same woman who was here in the afternoon, wasn't it?"

"The same. We'll call her Annabelle, if you like."

"You've known her—a considerable time?"

"Fairly well," answered Rawlins.

"And you introduced her to my father?"

"No."

"You mean to say father—"

She finished it with a look.

"Oh, no—not that, either," he said quickly.

Thus far he had contrived to leave Kane out of it. He did not know how long he would be able to keep him out, but he had a sense of delicacy about making precipitate revelations. He felt that the disgrace of Henry Kilbourne was sufficient for Hilda's morning. Concerning his own disgrace—that, of course, was too obvious for discussion.

"Then I don't believe I understand how my father came to meet her," said Hilda slowly, searching her mind for a possible explanation.

"I am not quite certain myself."

"I suppose she's determined to have a scandal?"

"Not necessarily, I think."

"She wants money, of course," mused Hilda.

"She's had some already," answered Rawlins. "I don't know how much; it seemed considerable. Perhaps it will prove sufficient."

"And what about our car?"

"That's something we can only guess. I felt it was necessary to get her off the premises."

Hilda nodded. She was ready to concede that he had managed that part of it capably. She would have given Annabelle all the cars in the garage rather than have her mother awakened; but Annabelle herself was still unexplained.

An idea kept thrusting itself into her mind in annoying fashion. Perhaps the explanation of Rawlins was to be found in Annabelle. People with hidden pasts and undisclosed purposes sometimes had accomplices. Somehow the theory did not jump smoothly with her instinct in the matter, but she could not utterly reject it.

She no longer considered very seriously the possibility that they were entertaining Franklin Fielding. She felt that she must look elsewhere for the key to the Rawlins riddle; but she did not like this alternative key.

"Yes, it was necessary to get her away," she said. "No matter what happens, my mother must be spared. Not only does she detest gambling; but anything like this

would—" A gesture finished the sentence. "I suppose you will handle the negotiations?" she added.

"What negotiations?"

"With this woman—for money. My father, of course, will turn it over to his lawyers."

Rawlins considered. He was getting the drift of her unspoken theory, and it did not greatly please him; but the situation hampered him. Hilda's philosophic attitude puzzled him, too. He could have handled an outbreak more confidently.

"It may not be necessary to negotiate," he told her.

"I hope not. The family is able to pay, of course. You won't find us haggling."

He glanced at her, slightly frowning. A few days ago the affair would have pleased him reasonably well. Coming at this time, it did not join happily with his slowly shaping project; yet he felt that he was a long way from the point of complete revelation—farther away, perhaps, than he had been twenty-four hours ago.

A hail aroused them, and they saw Marian. She glanced curiously at the pair as she approached and stood in front of them, cloaked in a woolly shroud that matched her sister's, with her bare toes showing beneath it.

"I've told you to wear shoes coming down from the house," said Hilda, returning to the practical.

"But I like the feel of the wet grass," explained Marian. "I haven't cut my foot this summer. How long have you two been here?"

There was something suspicious in the question, and a sharp glance from one to the other went with it; but Marian did not wait for an answer. There was something else that pressed too urgently.

"Kane's not in his room," she announced. "Hasn't been in his bed all night."

Hilda looked up swiftly.

"I knocked, to see if he was coming down for a swim. Then I looked in."

"Does mother know?" demanded Hilda.

"No fear! Mother's still asleep. And father—"

Marian made a gesture which conveyed the idea that Henry Kilbourne might easily sleep until the general call to judgment.

Hilda turned to Rawlins.

"You didn't tell me anything about Kane," she said.

"I didn't feel at liberty."

She was struggling with a swift reorganization of her thoughts. Her view-point had changed in a flash, and with it came a feeling of odd relief—soothing, at first, then annoying as she became aware of it.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"I'm not certain," he said. "I have a fairly good idea where he was a few hours ago. Don't worry; he's safe enough."

But her worry was not chiefly for Kane. It concerned the whole family. The discovery that Rawlins had given but a partial explanation irritated her. He knew, of course, that she had been leaping at conclusions, and perhaps her blindness had amused him.

Marian caught an expression of vexed perplexity on her sister's face. She grinned and winked at Rawlins.

"We've got to have something ready to tell mother," said Hilda.

"Let Wade do it," advised Marian. "He can invent the most beautiful explanations in the world."

"I believe I'll go in," remarked Hilda, half to herself, rising.

"Come on, Wade," challenged Marian.

"Back dive this morning!" But Rawlins shook his head and followed Hilda in the direction of the house. He caught up with her, and their cloaked figures moved on in silence for several yards. Then, beyond ear-shot of Marian, she spoke to him.

"This woman is some affair of Kane's, isn't she?"

"I don't think it's a very serious one," he answered.

"You can't tell about the Kilbournes. Sometimes we're headlong."

Herbert Wheeler was not in her mind as she spoke, but a memory of him came instantly afterward, and brought a flush to her cheeks. Rawlins did not miss it.

"The Kilbournes may make mistakes," he said; "but they make good recoveries."

"Who is she?" asked Hilda.

He told her what he knew.

"Had you seen her before yesterday?"

"No, but I knew she existed, and when I saw a blonde it wasn't hard to guess."

"Does father know about the Kane end of it?"

Rawlins smiled involuntarily.

"I doubt it," he said. "He made no comment when I— He said nothing before retiring."

"We've got to get Kane out of it, of course."

"Of course."

"And no matter who else knows, mother mustn't."

"That's understood, too."

"And I'm afraid it's chiefly up to you," she said reluctantly.

As they reached the house, she paused for a frank study of him.

"Why did you let me go on misunderstanding yesterday—and this morning?" she asked.

"You didn't ask me—yesterday."

"But this morning—"

"Things were more complicated then."

"I suppose you know what I've been thinking about you and this woman?"

"I'm sure you gave me the benefit of a reasonable doubt," he said.

Hilda shook her head.

"I'm not so sure. It wasn't fair to me. Wade. None of it's been fair, right from the beginning. There are things I—all of us—ought to know. It can't go on like this. We're all getting involved in something we don't understand. We're all getting in debt to you, and you won't give us a chance to know what it means. It worries me, Wade!"

She had not meant to make another appeal to him, but she realized that she had done it. Her eyes were very serious as she watched him; but he balked her again with a smile.

"See you at breakfast in twenty minutes," he said.

"Fifteen!" she challenged, with an abrupt change of mood.

She knew it was useless to pursue a subject when he was determined to set it aside.

With breakfast came other topics, mainly inconsequential. Besides, Mrs. Kilbourne joined them, and then Marian, and in such a quartet it was impossible to talk about the private affairs of Kane and Mr. Kilbourne.

The latter did not appear at breakfast. Grosvenor was sent up-stairs to make an inquiry, and returned with word that the master was tired and preferred to sleep late. Mrs. Kilbourne missed the significance of a peculiar note of disapproval in his voice, but it was not wasted upon the trio who knew.

After breakfast Rawlins undertook to divert Mrs. Kilbourne's mind from possible inquiry as to Kane, whose absence from

the table was of no unusual account, but whose failure to appear during the forenoon might awaken inquiries. Rawlins had been assigned to the task by Hilda, and he performed it by giving Mrs. Kilbourne a postponed lesson in bridge.

It was almost noon when Mr. Kilbourne came down-stairs. He relied on the potency of a brave front, which masked his feelings so successfully that he appeared positively cocky; but the front was only skin deep. He did not yet know how widely Annabelle had circulated her presence; the only person he remembered besides Annabelle was Rawlins. He did not know whether he was concerned most about Hilda or Mrs. Kilbourne, but when the latter looked up from her bridge lesson with a self-conscious and somewhat apologetic smile, he obtained immediate relief in that quarter.

This emboldened him to seek the garage, for he had an indistinct recollection that Annabelle had disappeared in the touring-car, and he wondered what had become of it. He felt that it was the cautious thing to clear up certain mysteries one at a time.

The touring-car was in the garage. So was Kane Kilbourne, whose eyes had the heavy appearance of a young man in need of sleep. Talking to Kane was Hilda, and she was talking after the fashion of a woman who intends to say all that is in her mind.

Mr. Kilbourne, unobserved, paused long enough to obtain an understanding of certain things. Then the righteousness of a guilty conscience surged strongly within him, and he strode forward with a black look in his face.

"Out all night, eh?" he demanded.

Kane turned and surveyed his father with an entire absence of alarm. In fact, his expression was one of unfilial and undisguised curiosity.

"Yes, I was out all night," he answered. "What about it?"

Mr. Kilbourne seemed to miss the air of confidence. He saw only an amazing effrontery in his son.

"So you admit it!" he said, in his most thunderous tone. "Where were you, sir? And what were you doing? And what the devil do you mean by it?"

Kane yawned, and glanced at Hilda. She was watching the pair, content to let the situation develop itself.

"Well, sir?" said Mr. Kilbourne.

"I've nothing to say," answered Kane.

"What?"

"Except that I didn't come home with a brass band in the middle of the night, if that interests you."

Mr. Kilbourne was staring threateningly. He did not yet wholly grasp the significance of his son's remark.

"I didn't come home with a chorus-girl at the wheel yelling her head off," added Kane brutally. "Now, if you've got anything to say to me, go ahead and say it!"

The head of the family retreated a pace. He still stared, but it was no longer a look of truculence. He resembled a man who had sustained a violent blow in the midriff and was slightly nauseated. His lower lip drooped, and he was moistening it with his tongue, unconscious of the fact that it gave him somewhat the appearance of an ancient and apologetic horse.

"Wha-what's that?" he asked.

Kane laughed and found himself filled with new courage.

"I say I didn't play poker half the night, drink up somebody's private stock, and then go for a ride with a blonde who waked up half the neighborhood. You're a fine one to make a crack at me!"

Bold words were these for Kane Kilbourne, but he felt that he was adroitly shedding some of those which had been piled upon him by Hilda. Mr. Kilbourne's forehead was in a sudden perspiration, although it was comfortably cool in the garage. His glance roamed fearfully in the direction of his daughter.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said weakly.

"Yes, father, you do," remarked Hilda coldly.

"I—why, Hilda!"

"I guess Hilda can tell you a few things you forgot," said Kane, with a wicked grin.

Mr. Kilbourne groped for his handkerchief, sighed, and sat wearily on the running-board of the blue roadster. All the denial went out of him.

"It is just as Kane said," declared Hilda, measuring her words slowly. "It was utterly disgraceful. I saw it, the servants saw it, Marian saw it—everybody."

"Not Emily?" gasped Mr. Kilbourne.

"Fortunately mother slept. She was spared that much."

Mr. Kilbourne tried to give voice to an expression of thanks, but it was little more than a groan.

"When I think that my own father has so little regard for his family, I can only shudder," added Hilda.

"We never looked for anything quite so raw from the head of the establishment," volunteered Kane.

Hilda turned to her brother with scorn in her eyes.

"You are worse than father," she said.

"It was your fault in the beginning. I want to be perfectly fair to both of you, so I say that Kane was the worst, but not much. Both of you deserve the contempt of everybody else in the family, including the servants; and of course you have it. I've nothing more to say to either one of you."

"Hilda!" moaned Mr. Kilbourne.

But she had turned away and was leaving them. Kane, stripped of his confidence, eyed his father warily. Mr. Kilbourne still sat on the running-board of the roadster, wiping his forehead.

XXV

IN the middle of the afternoon there was a family conference. The fact that it was summoned by Mrs. Kilbourne gave it, to her husband and son, an initial aspect that was startling. The tension eased, however, when they discovered, after being assembled on a corner of the porch, that it was a conference for the purpose of discussing the family skeleton—Wade Rawlins.

Mrs. Kilbourne had in her hand some photographs, which she had chanced to pick up in Marian's room. They revealed Rawlins in uniform, standing beside one of the cars, sitting behind the wheel, and otherwise posed in attitudes entirely becoming to a chauffeur. Marian was entirely frank concerning them—a fact that alarmed Mrs. Kilbourne even more than any attempt at evasion.

Certainly Marian had taken the pictures. Why not? She had taken lots of pictures of everybody on the place. Yes, she had given two or three of them to some of the girls in the neighborhood. Was there anything the matter with that? Wasn't Wade a rather remarkable person? Hadn't he been important enough to become the family guest?

Marian had refused to see even a suggestion of enormity in the affair. Perhaps that was because Mrs. Kilbourne had not made clear her innermost fears. Nor did she state them at the family conference, for

they were far too alarming even for that. Mrs. Kilbourne had a ghastly suspicion that her younger daughter was in love.

Lacking the hardihood to share this idea with the other Kilbournes, she placed the conference on a different foundation. Nobody, of course, had a more kindly feeling than herself for Rawlins. She was careful to explain that; but here was something that threatened embarrassment, if not actual disaster. Photographs of Rawlins as a gentleman might pass current in the neighborhood, and their circulation might be tolerantly overlooked as the whim of an enthusiastic child; but photographs of Rawlins as a chauffeur—what was the answer to that problem?

The Kilbourne family discussed it with all the gravity that its weight demanded—all save Marian. She sat on the porch rail, swinging her legs and stubbornly declining to admit that there was embarrassment or danger in an incident so trivial.

"They'll just think we dressed him up in the uniform for a joke," she said.

But Mrs. Kilbourne shook her head.

"I've been afraid, even before I found these," she said. "I don't fully trust the servants."

"Fire 'em," suggested Marian.

Mrs. Kilbourne saw in this idea only something that added to her suspicions concerning the affections of her daughter.

"We can't upset the whole household," she said firmly. "It would cause an endless amount of gossip. Besides, the Harlans would grab Grosvenor. They're crazy to get him; and if he ever went over there, the whole neighborhood would know all about—everything."

"Well, then," said Mr. Kilbourne, "what's the answer?"

His wife sighed as she reached the point.

"I am wondering," she said, "if the time hasn't come when we must lose Rawlins."

Marian tossed her head in annoyance and almost lost her balance on the rail.

"That isn't square to him," she protested. "I don't see what you're all so afraid of. I didn't give away more than three or four pictures."

Mr. Kilbourne looked at his wife and rubbed his chin.

"You mustn't think I have the least unkindly feeling for him," said Mrs. Kilbourne, with a twinge of conscience. "I'm really very sorry. I had more hope in Rawlins's case than I ever had before."

Her husband grunted.

"But I'm thinking of the family," she added. "We have to think of ourselves first. We have to think of our position and everything."

"All right! We'll consider it all said," remarked Mr. Kilbourne, in a tone of slight impatience. "I'm satisfied. Emily thinks Rawlins ought to go. Suits me. How about you, Hilda?"

Hilda nodded her head slowly. There was nothing else to do.

"You, Kane?"

The two male Kilbournes eyed each other speculatively. Kane nodded his head. He did not see any alternative.

"I think you're all a bunch of quitters!" said Marian contemptuously.

She slid off the porch railing and stalked away, where she might sulk by herself. Mrs. Kilbourne sighed and shook her head faintly. Then the four elder Kilbournes exchanged glances.

"Well, it's agreed," said Mr. Kilbourne hastily.

He was not at all quiet in his mind about the business. So far as Hilda and Kane were concerned, he recognized his position as something more than equivocal. He did not yet know that Marian shared the knowledge of his disgrace. Marian was saving that for the negotiation of a financial transaction. But in the presence of his wife, there was no other attitude he could assume.

"Yes, we're agreed," said Mrs. Kilbourne. "Will you speak to him, Henry?"

"Who—me?"

Mr. Kilbourne's tone was one of intense surprise, and so was the look that backed his words.

"You are the head of the family, Henry."

Whether he was the head or not, there were reasons why Mr. Kilbourne eyed his wife with plain displeasure. She would not have understood if he had accused her of passing the buck, but such was his emphatic thought. And there was a distinct element of embarrassment in the proposal. The situation appeared to him thus:

He rather liked Rawlins. That was one reason for hesitation. Also, he rather feared Rawlins. There were things that Rawlins knew. Some of the family might know them, but not all. Rawlins was a mystery, and a mystery is always uncertain. Mr. Kilbourne was not in a mood to

invite unknown consequences. It was a time for caution.

"I may be the head of the family," he said, with a furtive glance toward Hilda; "but I'm not responsible for Rawlins. I didn't bring him here."

Mrs. Kilbourne's fan betrayed an uneasy fluttering.

"But you usually tell them to go, Henry," she said.

"People who do the hiring are supposed to do the firing," he observed, taking refuge in one of the maxims of his business.

Mrs. Kilbourne bit her lip and glanced toward her son.

"I suppose we could ask Kane to speak to him," she said reluctantly.

Kane was rarely a competent master of his emotions, and he made a very poor show of it now. He was frankly astonished—and apprehensive.

"What in thunder have I got to do with it?" he demanded.

"But you agreed that he ought to go," said his mother.

"But that doesn't make it my job. I'm not running the house!"

"We understand, Kane; but your father doesn't wish to speak to him, and so I thought—"

"Why, I haven't got any authority, mother."

"But I'll give you full authority," said Mrs. Kilbourne.

Mr. Kilbourne confirmed the authority by a nod; but Kane shook his head stubbornly. He looked at the matter in this way:

He rather liked Rawlins. That was one reason for hesitation. Also, he certainly feared Rawlins. There were things that Rawlins knew. Some of the family might know them, also, but not all. Rawlins was a mystery, and a mystery is always uncertain. Kane was not in a mood to invite unknown consequences. It was a time for caution—much caution.

"It's not up to me to discharge servants, or guests, or whatever he is," he said. "I don't think you ought to ask me to."

Marian, overpowered with the suspense, had drifted back into the group, and stood watching and listening with a heavy frown on her face.

"Certainly some man in the family ought to do it," said Mrs. Kilbourne.

"Tell Grosvenor, then," suggested Kane. "He hates him, anyhow."

Marian burst into a quick, meaning laugh.

"Yes, tell Grosvenor," she urged. "And I want to be there when it happens!"

Her mother motioned her into silence, fanned herself for several seconds, and then slowly turned her glance toward Hilda, whom she studied with speculative eyes.

"Hilda, you feel about it the way we all do. Would you—"

"No!"

Hilda answered so explosively that even Marian, who had certain information and views not vouchsafed to the remainder of the family, opened her eyes wider.

"You could probably do it more diplomatically than any of the others," suggested Mr. Kilbourne mildly.

"No!"

"But your father and brother—"

"No, mother. No!"

Mrs. Kilbourne was a perplexed woman. She did not understand why an entire family—not counting Marian, who was too young to understand—should prove so diffident in the matter of performance, after there had been unanimous agreement on the principle of the thing.

"You could say that you speak for your father and mother," she said.

Mr. Kilbourne assented to that with a nod, but Hilda was in one of her stubborn moods.

"No," was all she said; but she reasoned the matter something like this:

She rather liked Rawlins. Perhaps "rather" was not wholly accurate, but it would serve. That was one reason for hesitation. Also, she vaguely feared Rawlins. There were things that Rawlins knew. None of the family knew about Herbert Wheeler, for instance. They must never know. Besides, Rawlins was a mystery, and a mystery is always uncertain—sometimes intriguing. She was not in a mood to invite unknown consequences. It was a time for caution. Besides, if she carried the message, Rawlins might obey; and then what of the dark chapter?

"I'm sure Rawlins would understand if you explained, Hilda."

"Mother, I am not going to do it," said Hilda. "You've no right to ask me."

It was always useless to argue with Hilda when she reached this point, and Mrs. Kilbourne abandoned the task. There was a pause that threatened to become prolonged.

"Do it yourself, mother," said Marian.

Mrs. Kilbourne began fanning violently. It disturbed her to realize that the affair was moving in a vicious circle.

"It is very strange," she said, "that no member of my family is willing to help me in this matter!"

Marian was making no effort to conceal a satirical smile. If they were going to send Wade Rawlins away, she wanted the joy of seeing them squirm before they got to the point.

"I said it was your job in the first place," said Mr. Kilbourne, looking at his wife.

Kane and Hilda nodded, but their mother fanned a determined protest.

"It would be much better to have it come from somebody else," she said.

If the family waited for an explanation, they were disappointed. So far as her own case was concerned, Mrs. Kilbourne was dealing in conclusions, rather than arguments. Of course, in her unspoken thoughts she reasoned the matter rather closely.

She rather liked Rawlins. That was one reason for hesitation. Also, she rather feared him—yes, even Emily Kilbourne did. It was something that nobody in the family dreamed about, particularly her husband. She had been warned; she had even given a promise, and she had broken it. She knew that she was a guilty woman—and Rawlins knew it.

Henry Kilbourne had warned her, after she had sinned twice, never to play with the oil stocks they sell on the curb; but something about oil stocks always fascinated her. Perhaps it was the pictures of the derricks and the gushers and the general suggestion of alluring adventure. And again she had bought—out of her private

purse, to be sure, but nevertheless in a moment of delightful wickedness and secrecy. She had shown the certificates to Rawlins; and Rawlins, making discreet inquiry, had reported the same thing that Henry Kilbourne always told her. She had gambled again in wildcat stocks, just as she gambled in tramps—and if Henry ever knew!

"Go on, mother—you do it," repeated Marian, wickedly, without knowing the torture she inflicted.

"I am very much disappointed in everybody," said Mrs. Kilbourne, still fanning violently.

Now there came a long pause, during which the four elder members of the family avoided looking at one another. Marian broke it, as she did most pauses.

"Want me to do it?" she asked.

They looked at her, and Hilda's look was suspicious.

"I thought you were opposed to it," said Mrs. Kilbourne, surprised.

"I am, but I haven't lost my nerve," said Marian sweetly. "I'm not afraid to tell him what you want."

Mrs. Kilbourne glanced at her husband, but he was intently gazing at his grove of trees.

"Well, if you really wish to speak to him, Marian," said her mother, "try to be kindly about it."

Marian grinned.

"And perhaps it would not be necessary to say that it comes in a formal way from the family," added Mrs. Kilbourne. "You might even give him to understand that it's just an impression you gathered—"

"Gee, what a courageous crowd you are!" exclaimed Marian. "I'll tell him, but I'll tell him in my own way!"

(To be concluded in the February number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE POET'S LOT

I'M glad of the life I have to lead
With words and moons and women's faces;
And though thereof little gold get I,
I never would change places
With satraps on their glittering thrones;
No, not for all yon fellow owns
Who went so swiftly by,
With plutocratic speed—
Just now, I mean,
In that big, vulgar limousine!

Richard Leigh

Drops of Death

A STORY OF THE NEW PERILS OF MODERN SCIENCE

By George Allan England

AT his desk in the little private room of the offices where he carried on his business as a commission merchant in grains and cereals, Weldon Forrester was reading a letter which greatly astonished him. It ran thus:

DEAR SIR:

You are named in the will of Dr. Townsend Veazey, recently deceased, as one of the beneficiaries. Dr. Veazey has willed you two small oriental rugs, a number of books, pamphlets, and reports, and some apparatus. Kindly indicate where you would like the bequest sent, and oblige,
Very truly yours,
COSSLET & MELVILLE.

The light of a sunshiny winter's day, coming through the window near his desk, showed Forrester to be an alert-looking man of thirty, a trifle lean, with incisive eyes, and with dark hair that had already retreated a little from a well-shaped forehead.

"H-m!" grunted Forrester. "Rugs, books, apparatus—funny!"

Very carefully he looked over the letter, but there was no P. S. Its message was final. Forrester's mouth—firm-lipped, the mouth of a doer of deeds—curved in a sardonic smile.

"Devilish funny!" he repeated.

From the outer offices drifted the chatter of typewriters under the fingers of busy girls. Three years ago there had been but one girl and a dingy little place on Crampton Street. Now Forrester employed a dozen girls and a staff of other workers. He had gone far in three years.

He laid the lawyers' letter on his desk, contemplatively lighted a cigar, and grew reflective.

"The doctor always said he was going to leave me a bunch of coin," thought he. "Not that I need it now; but every little bit makes just a little bit more."

Emphatically Weldon Forrester did not

need legacies. He had all the legacy he needed in his "go-get-it" spirit.

Proof of that lay in what he had accomplished since he and old Mogul Edgerton, of the Fiduciary Assurance and Annuity Company, had disagreed, and Edgerton had fired him. Now Forrester had his hand on a big percentage of all the Argentine wheat entering the States, and was reaching for more. He could write his check for six figures, which might soon be seven. America is like that to you, sometimes, if you strike her just right.

"Wonder whatever happened to the doctor to change his mind about remembering me with something nice!" pondered Forrester. "He always liked me, ever since I sold him an annuity against his will—always liked to have me drop in for a chat on scientific stuff. The old boy could make chemistry and poisons more interesting than a magazine story. Good fellow, all right! Well, he's gone—and there's been another slip between the cup and the lip, somehow."

Forrester dismissed the letter from his mind and plunged back into work. Outside, the morning traffic and bustle of the city's vast market blurred the air with confusion. Trucks grumbled over slushy cobbles, motor-horns moaned, buyers and sellers of produce chaffered busily. Forrester forgot all about the letter, and all about Dr. Townsend Veazey.

At lunch, however, in the grill-room of the Lockwood Inn, he read the letter over again.

"Wonder if the doctor had any money when that heart-attack took him?" thought Forrester. "Wonder if he blew it on that other big annuity he was thinking about, after all?"

Lunch over, he threaded narrow, crowded ways to the Horsman Building and went up to the offices of the Fiduciary on the eleventh floor. With the assurance of a

one-time employee, joined to that of a successful man who feels himself at home everywhere, he walked down the corridor and turned into an office that bore on its ground-glass door the legend:

ELI WORMWOOD, ACTUARY

Eli, all alone in his office, looked over his desk-top and his gold-rimmed glasses simultaneously as he smiled a superannuated welcome.

"Hello, Forrester! Got some business for us?" he asked thinly.

"Never no more!" Forrester held up a solemn hand, and sat himself down in the best chair. "I'm off that stuff now. Did a little of it, a while after I quit here, but never again! Why should I go around with a tin bill on, picking up the chicken-feed of annuity commissions, when I've got my trough full of grain? Answer—I shouldn't, and won't. Best little thing old Mogul ever did for me was when he gave me the air!"

"So it seems," agreed Wormwood, rubbing a hawk's-bill nose. "You drive a rather better car than he does now, I hear."

"Hope so. By the way, Wormwood, I dropped in to offer you a position—not a job, but a position. I need a man 'way up in figures to take charge of a new cost-system I'm installing. I'll better your present salary, whatever it is. You were mighty good to me when I was a cub in the insurance game, and I'm not forgetting it. Well, what say?"

The wizen actuary shook his head.

"Mighty fine of you, Forrester, and I'm no need obliged, but I can't change now. At fifty-nine a man's riveted to routine. Insurance is the breath of life to me. Guess I'm aboard this ship till she sinks or I die. Hope she lasts as long as I do!"

Forrester pricked up his ears at that.

"Of course she'll last," said he, with a quick glance. "I've heard the Fiduciary never put across as many annuities in a year as she has this past one."

"Yes," agreed Eli; "but there's not much profit in annuities, the way people hang on."

"You mean, as the old saying is, that annuitants never die?"

"Seems so. Seems as if, when folks—especially old ones—sink their cash with us, and know we've got to pay 'em a good round income all the rest of their lives, they just quit worrying and get fat and

healthy. Only way I can account for Methuselah and the Bible patriarchs is that they all must have had annuities!"

"They don't *all* live forever," commented Forrester. "There's Dr. Veazey that's just died—heart failure, I think it was. He had one of your annuities, and he was only about seventy-six."

"And four months, nine days," supplemented Wormwood. "And what's more, he took out another big one—paid eighty-five thousand for it—only about a fortnight before he died; but it's the exception that proves the rule, you know."

"Lucky strike for the Fiduciary," smiled Forrester.

"We need it. We've been hard hit since the war."

"No! Is that so?"

"Yes, sir," affirmed the actuary. "Our stock's hardly paying three and a half, and it used to run six and seven. Mogul's let a lot of clerks and supernumeraries out, and he's tightening up all round. Fact is, the general business depression has got us, too. Just between you and me, Forrester, my own position's none too secure."

"Well," smiled Forrester, standing up, "if you need another, you've got my address. Got to be on my way now. My cereal story's never done. Busy! It never grains but it pours. So-long!"

All the way back to South Commercial Street, Forrester was pondering:

"So Veazey took another big annuity on his own hook, did he? That's why all the legacy I got was two rugs, some books, and apparatus, eh? I was a chump to tell him about annuities and to sell him one! I'm out of luck—but," he added, "Veazey was worse out of luck. To sink eighty-five thousand dollars in a money-back-if-you-live proposition, and then in two weeks have your heart give out—some tough game!"

II

THREE days later, in the restaurant of Aspinwall Chambers—a bachelor-apartment establishment where he dwelt in no inconsiderable style—Forrester paused over his breakfast as he came upon an item in his morning *Chronicle*. With knit brows he read the item, then murmured:

"Well, I'll be darned if here isn't another one!"

The paragraph recorded the death, apparently from heart failure, of an old

maiden lady, Miss Cynthia Grush. Miss Grush had for many years lived at 274 Muir Terraces, in company with rather a formidable houseful of cats. The news of this death would have been absolutely devoid of interest to Forrester if he had not happened to remember that only a few weeks before he left the Fiduciary Miss Grush had taken out an annuity under rather odd circumstances.

With his penknife, Forrester neatly cut out the item. He put it carefully into his pocketbook.

"Queer old bird she was," said he. "Really seemed to believe that wheeze about annuitants never dying. Seemed to think that having an annuity would insure her almost indefinite life. Well, she's gone now, all right, and the Fiduciary's in luck again to the tune of about fifty-five thousand dollars!"

Then, his eye catching the shipping news, where he saw recorded the proximate arrival of the grain-steamer *Mariposa*, from Buenos Aires, he forgot all about Cynthia Grush and the Fiduciary.

That evening he found a parcel-post package awaiting him at the door of his apartment. He opened it in his little den.

"Two rugs, extremely small," he took stock. "One bunch of technical books, pamphlets, and reports. A microscope and some slides. Thanks, doctor! Most of this stuff is about as useful to a commission merchant as two tails to a hen. Thus end my great expectations; but thanks, just the same!"

He spread the rugs on his floor, put the books and reports on his shelves, and tucked the microscope into a closet.

"Poor old doc!" said he. "Your investment of eighty-five thousand dollars didn't do *you* much good, did it?"

For a while he remained pondering, his face clouded by an odd expression.

III

A FEW days after the beginning of the new year, Forrester's *Evening Standard* informed him that one Simeon Langstroth, of the fashionable Randol Park section, had died of heart failure.

"Well now!" said Forrester. "The people I sold annuities to, in the old days, seem to be out of luck. I remember I landed this old boy for thirty thousand. Of course, that was rather a small one for the Fiduciary, which specializes on high-class

trade and big policies—quality, not quantity of clientele. Wonder if Langstroth's been taking out any more lately!"

At noon Forrester dropped in at the City Hall and looked up some data in the files of the registrar of vital statistics. When he came out of the building, his lips were rather tight. All afternoon Miss Brewster, his private secretary, noticed that he seemed abstracted.

That evening, at the Commerce Club, a long-distance call reached him from Crompton & Marvin, his New York agents. Urgent business impended. Forrester phoned Miss Brewster to "carry on" in his absence, and took the midnight train to New York. There his business lengthened out to three days, arranging for some shipments of hard wheat from the new Trenque Lauquen fields in the Pampa district. Forrester clean forgot all about annuities, heart failure, and the Fiduciary.

Then, all at once, the finger of fate reached out and tapped him on the shoulder again.

That tap was disguised as a small item at the bottom of page five of the *Courier*, which he was reading at lunch. The item said:

Portsmouth, N. H., Jan. 7.—Willard Rockwood, of Newington, died at his home yesterday, aged seventy-four. Mr. Rockwood formerly conducted the Springvale Dairy Farm, but retired from business about eight years ago. Death was caused by heart failure. The deceased was a member of the Grange, Odd Fellows, and Masons, and is survived by a brother, Gallatin K. Rockwood, of this city.

"Well, I *will* be damned!" exclaimed Forrester. "Another one!"

A few days later he again visited the registrar's office, where he carefully ran over the deaths for the preceding week. This process he repeated a week later, and again after still another week. At the back of his brain—when business could be thrust aside—a tiny spark was glowing. Day by day the spark brightened to a flame almost of conviction.

It was toward the beginning of February that the grain merchant once more dropped in at the offices of the Fiduciary and paid another visit to old Eli Wormwood.

"Yes, I've got some business for you this time," he answered the actuary's question.

"Good!" approved Eli. "We need it, right enough. The way they've been hammering our stock and prying into our se-

curities, on top of the general slump in business, makes every dollar count now." The old man blinked over his glasses. "So you've brought us in something, eh? Well, even though you've piled up more money than most of us even dream about, I suppose you can still use that little four-percent agent's commission?"

Forrester waved a disclaiming hand.

"None in this for me, this time," he answered.

"How's that?"

"The commission's going to you."

"To me?" asked Wormwood, visibly brightening.

"If you want it. I'll place the business through you. I'm taking out an annuity for myself."

"Good idea!" the actuary approved.

"But of course, at your age, the rate's pretty low. Twenty-nine, are you?"

"Thirty, the 5th of last June."

"H-m! Thirty years, seven months, twenty-five days. Your interest-rate will only be 4.608 per cent, giving you an annual income of forty-six dollars and eight cents for each thousand dollars invested."

"I know all about that. It seems small, but an annuity is about the safest place where I can invest a little cash. What I'm going to sink with you will clear me forty-six hundred and eight dollars a year, and no worry about it."

"What?" ejaculated the old man, blinking with excitement. "You don't mean you're going to put in a hundred thousand dollars?"

Forrester nodded.

"That's a tidy four thousand for you in commission," he added. "You don't mind, do you?"

Old Wormwood turned a little paler even than usual, and his lips trembled visibly as he answered:

"I—I oughtn't to—I can't—"

"Nonsense! You can, and will."

"But you can act as your own agent, Forrester, and save the four thousand dollars. You still have your license."

"Yes, and I still have a very lively sense of gratitude for many a good tip you slid me when I was in this game. Come on now, Wormwood, don't let any personal considerations do you out of four thousand good simoleons! Get me an application-blank and take my check. No physical examination in writing an annuity. The company don't care how punk the appli-

cant's health is. Punker the better, for the company, eh?"

"Yes, that's so," admitted the actuary, getting up. "Since all money paid for annuities goes to the company as its absolute property, of course it's to the company's interest to have the annuitant die as soon as possible. That sounds harsh, but it's the strict business principle that governs the annuity game. I—I'll write this business for you, Forrester. We'll have it over in no time. Just a minute, please."

Shaking and a trifle dazed, the old man shuffled out of the office and went for an application-blank. He was almost stunned at having four thousand dollars drop into his hand out of a clear sky.

Forrester lighted a long, thin cigar, and peered through smoke at the ceiling.

"Sometimes it costs a penny to get at the inside facts," he mused; "but it's worth the penny. After all, as an investment, an annuity can't be beat. Now we shall see what we shall see!"

IV

IMMEDIATELY after the issuing to him of the annuity which was to yield him an income of four thousand six hundred and eight dollars, payable quarterly, Forrester installed in his apartment on the third floor of Aspinwall Chambers a rather ingenious set of electric wiring. This wiring he devised himself. It was all most carefully concealed.

Forrester so arranged it that when the current was on, no door or window in the apartment could be moved without causing the system to function. He took particular pains with the connections that he made on the two windows communicating with the fire-escape.

When the alarm was sprung, it operated a slight, tingling shock between poles that could be strapped to his ankle as he lay in bed. The current could be broken by a switch under his pillow, where also he planted a businesslike revolver, fully loaded with forty-four-caliber cartridges.

In addition to all this, Forrester rigged a push-button at his bedside, which would turn on all lights in the apartment. Moreover, he put a first-rate alarm-clock into the alarm circuit, and so wired it that when the clock-hands reached any desired point, instead of the alarm sounding, the shock would be thrown on. Thus he was enabled to test the shock. A full week of trials con-

vinced him that it would inevitably wake him from even the soundest sleep.

He also tried the doors and windows many times. Any disturbance of them invariably caused the shock to operate. Furthermore, Forrester trained himself to wake up quietly in response to the shock—not to start or turn over or utter a sound.

When he had everything working to his complete satisfaction, he disconnected the alarm-clock from the circuit; but he never went to bed, even a single night, without strapping the poles of his little apparatus to his right ankle and making certain that it would work. He took the greatest care that none of the wiring should be visible.

Thus he waited, and winter lagged toward spring. Business continued much as usual. So did Forrester's very moderate social affairs.

Ordinarily he spent his evenings alone, smoking and reading. His tastes were omnivorous. The books and pamphlets bequeathed him by Dr. Veazey lasted him almost a fortnight. He followed them with the "Outline of History," by Wells.

Now and then he visited the Bureau of Vital Statistics at the City Hall; but whatever it was that he discovered there, or did not discover, he kept very much his own property.

And so the weeks passed, and still nothing happened.

"It would be a pity, wouldn't it," thought Forrester, "if the spider should have got his parlor all ready, and there shouldn't be any fly to walk into it?"

There was, however, a fly, and very much of a fly, at that, as we shall now immediately see.

V

It was in the early morning of March 3, six weeks and four days after the issuance of the annuity, that Forrester was roused from a dreamless sleep, being awakened at about a quarter past two o'clock by the faint, insistent tingle of the current on his ankle.

Broad awake in a moment, he lay quite still, simulating slumber.

For perhaps five minutes—which seemed as many hours—neither sound nor sight rewarded him. Then, all at once, a ghostly little glimmer of light trembled a second in the den off his bedroom. Forrester perceived it quite plainly, from under lids all but closed. He sensed, rather than heard,

that some one was moving toward the bedroom door.

Forrester was a man of hard sense and few nerves; but even so, his heart throbbed faster. None the less, he forced himself to breathe quietly and naturally. He did not try even to switch off the current, but let it prickle.

Under his pillow, he knew, lay the heavily loaded gun. Close at hand was the button, which could flood the apartment with light.

Silence continued. From the Parkway sounded a faint burr of pebbled tires as some belated motorist broke the speed laws. An amorous cat distantly serenaded his Maria; but in the apartment all was so still that the ticking of the alarm-clock on the shelf was plainly audible. Yet Forrester well knew that a sinister purpose was close at hand, watching, waiting in the dark.

Forrester lay relaxed, just as he had waked, his right arm bare above the elbow. That arm was outside the coverlet.

"Rather lucky!" thought he. "Good bait, if what I suspect is true!"

He remained entirely slack, but with every muscle ready to whip into prompt and swift activity.

Still the black silence lengthened. Only after what seemed an interminable time of tension heavy with evil possibilities did the unseen presence move forward. A flicker, vaguely white as a will-o'-the-wisp, fingered palely into the bedroom. Some one was entering the room on noiseless soles; some one, with infinite precaution, was drawing near the bed.

Forrester still played his rôle of slumber. A moment the unknown presence stood beside him. The tiniest of electric flashes played upon the bed. Its beam stopped on Forrester's arm. Through concealing lashes, Forrester perceived it. Beyond its little circle, all was black. The effect of that ring of light on his arm, cast by some unseen maleficence, tore at the nerves. Forrester wanted to strike, to leap, to grapple; but he held himself. Not yet was the time ripe. Not yet had the thing been done which he expected, which he longed for.

The waiting, however, was not long. Forrester knew that the dark presence was bending above him. Then all at once on his bare arm he felt something—something almost impalpable—something like a tiny wet flick—something that, had he been asleep, would never have awakened him.

Something that, quite to the contrary, would have soothed him to a sleep from which there is no morrow.

Forrester moved not, nor gave any slightest sign of consciousness. Again that tiny something fell, and a third time. Then Forrester knew the light had died; knew that the figure of mystery was turning soundlessly.

With tensions released like a steel spring, Forrester flung aside the bedclothes and leaped—leaped and struck.

VI

At eleven o'clock that morning—an eminently dignified hour to call on the president of a life-insurance and annuity company—the grain merchant sent in his card to Wolcott Edgerton, otherwise Mogul Edgerton, of the Fiduciary.

"He says he's sorry," reported the boy, "but he can't see nobody this mornin'."

Forrester wrote on a slip of paper:

You will see me at once.

He signed it and handed the paper to the boy.

"Take that in," he commanded.

In half a minute the youth reappeared.

"He says come in."

Forrester went in and shut the door. He tossed his hat on a table.

"Well, Forrester!" said Mogul, dangling agitated glasses by a black grosgrain ribbon. "This is rather peremptory, isn't it?" Even though Forrester now held an annuity in the company, Mogul couldn't forget that he had once been an employee, a despised agent. "What's on your chest?"

"Nothing but a slight cold. There's something on my arm, however, that may interest you."

"Pardon me, but you're in the wrong department," replied Edgerton. "If you'll step into the next office, Dr. Grundlach will advise you. As a policy-holder of any kind in this company, you're entitled to a reasonable amount of medical attention, gratis. Right in that way, please!"

Mogul pointed toward the door that led into Dr. Grundlach's office. He looked a bit uneasy, Forrester thought.

"Thanks, but I don't require any more medical attention," said Forrester. "I've been getting rather too much from the Fiduciary recently. Now—"

"Complaint department is up-stairs in Room 1186."

Forrester only took off his overcoat and flung it over a chair. Then he walked to the door of Dr. Grundlach's office and closed it. Within, he caught sight of the doctor's bald head bent over a desk.

He returned to Mogul, drew up a chair, and sat down.

"Now," said he, "let's discuss brass tacks!"

"You're making rather free here, aren't you?" demanded the president.

"Very." Forrester drew out his pocket-book, produced a little sheaf of clippings, and laid one before Mogul. "Here's a notice of the death of Dr. Townsend Veazey. He died of heart failure, shortly after having taken out an annuity with you for eighty-five thousand dollars."

"Well?" asked Edgerton, fidgeting with the ribbon of his glasses.

"The Fiduciary cleaned up big on that heart failure. Now, here's the case of Miss Cynthia Grush. More heart failure—more clean-up!"

"What do you mean to infer?" demanded Mogul angrily.

"Now, here's Willard Rockwood," smiled Forrester, unmoved. "What singularly bad hearts your annuitants seem to have—especially those carrying large amounts!"

"See here, Forrester!" cut in Mogul. "If you've come here to insult a man who fired you three years ago—"

"I wouldn't push that desk-button, if I were you," advised Forrester. His smile was cold, dangerous. "Here are several more clippings from local and out-of-town papers. I've been doing a little collecting lately. Look them over. What extraordinary luck your company seems to be having, just at a time when it's hard pressed!"

"Who told you it was hard pressed?" questioned Mogul, flushing.

"Oh, the proverbial little bird. Of course nobody would ever notice anything about deaths such as these, except a man who'd been in the game, and who knew a good many of your investors—some of them personally—and who could think. Read those clippings, Mr. Edgerton. They'll interest you."

Mogul adjusted his glasses and tried to read, but his attention wandered.

"I—I've been away much of the time since last November," he hesitated. "I—"

"Why make excuses? All I'm asking you to do is to read those clippings."

Edgerton began again. Forrester watched him keenly. From Dr. Grundlach's office drifted a slight sound as of a chair being pushed back.

All at once, Mogul looked up.

"What the devil are you driving at, anyhow?" he blurted, dully flushed.

"You know, of course, that I hold an annuity for a hundred thousand dollars in the Fiduciary?"

"Yes."

"I took it as an investment—in two senses. It's already paid me fully, though I came near dying of heart failure myself, last night!"

"You? Why, you—you're the picture of health!"

"I am; but if I hadn't acted quick, I'd have been the picture of a fine, full-sized corpse this minute. What's more, you people would have been a hundred thousand dollars ahead of the game."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Mogul, starting up. His wattles crimsoned like a turkey-cock's.

"Keep perfectly calm, Mr. Edgerton," smiled Forrester. "I've still got one more exhibit to show you. See here!" He shoved up his right sleeve. "Does that suggest anything to you?" he demanded.

"Does what suggest anything to me?" asked Edgerton.

"Those three blisters on my arm," replied Forrester, indicating a trio of small red marks.

Mogul peered at them, and—whether he really meant it or whether he was a consummate actor—replied:

"All they suggest to me is that you've been slightly burned in some way."

"Intelligent observation!" gibed the commission merchant.

"Well, why do you ask *me*? If there's anything the matter with you, see Dr. Grundlach. I told you that before."

"Do you know what burned me?"

"How the devil should I know?" ejaculated Mogul angrily. "And what the devil do you mean by catechizing me in this manner, anyhow? I don't think you need to see Dr. Grundlach, after all. A good alienist would be more in your line!"

"Thank you for the suggestion," said Forrester icily. "Now let me tell you a little story, which happens to be a true one—the story of these burns."

He pulled his sleeve down again and fixed a gimlet-like eye on Edgerton. The

president of the Fiduciary braved his look with indignation; but whether that was sincere or only a pose, not even Forrester could tell.

"I'm not at all interested in your burns, or in you," said Mogul, "or your clippings, or your story. This is my busy morning."

He reached for the push-button again.

"Wait!" commanded Forrester. "I'm giving you one more chance. Touch that button, and the most formidable scandal will be turned loose that ever shook the insurance world. You and the Fiduciary and everybody connected with it will go down in a whirlpool of public indignation. Guilty and innocent will suffer alike. If you are innocent, or have consideration for those that are, wait!"

"Wha-what d'you mean, sir?" stammered Mogul, his eyes rimmed with white. "Upon my word, sir, I do believe you are insane!"

"Thank you. And now, listen. At about a quarter past two o'clock this morning I was awakened by a man in my apartment—an intruder. I waited till he had done what he came to do, and then jumped up and tackled him. I hit him at random, as hard as I could, and knocked him flat. He was up in a second, though, before I could do more than turn on the lights. Then we had it hot and heavy; but I crashed a chair over his head, and that held him till I could cover him with my gun. Get all this?"

"What the deuce has it to do with *me*, sir?"

"That's for you to judge, Mr. Edgerton. I phoned Station K, and they sent up a couple of men on the double-quick. Before they got to my rooms, though, I frisked my prisoner."

"Frisked?"

"Searched him. I took away from him something of unique interest. That man—a slim chap, clever as a cat—is now held on my charge of breaking and entering. I didn't want to stir things up by entering a charge of attempted murder, till after I'd seen you."

"What? What have I to do with it?"

"You're either uncommonly ignorant of what's going on in your own business," smiled Forrester, "or else you're missing your real profession by not going on the stage. That man, I'm willing to bet my last pair of boots, is the actual murderer of Dr. Veazey, of Miss Grush, of Mr. Rock-

wood, and of a number of other annuitants in your company. He's a specialist in heart failure. Who is his employer? That's what I'm here to find out."

Mr. Edgerton, from red, became a pasty gray. The color drained even from his lips, leaving them bluish. His hand went out shakingly.

"You—you're not accusing—"

"I'm accusing John Doe, as yet unidentified, that's all; but John's as guilty as hell! Who is he? Who hired that man to steal into people's homes with the deadliest rattlesnake of a weapon ever invented, and murder them in a way that nobody could detect unless the fiend was caught in the very act?"

"What—what weapon do you mean?" tremored Edgerton.

"This!" exclaimed Forrester. "Here's something which the very devil himself must have thought out!"

From his pocket he produced a little flat instrument-case. He snapped open the case, and took from it a small glass-barreled syringe with German silver fittings.

"This is the infernal thing that's made a few hundred thousand for your damned company during the last few months!" exclaimed the merchant. "Now look at it!"

The president's eyes bulged as he regarded the syringe that Forrester laid on the desk before him. Within it, a translucent liquid half filled the barrel. Forrester's eyes were hard and hateful as he studied Edgerton.

"D'you know what's in that devilish thing?" he demanded.

Edgerton shook a tremulous head.

"So help me God," he stammered, "I—I never saw that thing before—or heard of it, or in any way knew—anything about it! This is all horrible, incredible news to me! You're bringing an awful accusation, Mr. Forrester. Are you—are you quite positive—"

"I'll say I am! If you're telling the truth, if you're really ignorant of the appalling series of crimes that somebody in this company has been putting over, I'll tell you what's in this engine of death. It's a liquified form of a certain deadly gas, recently discovered—a gas called lewisite. Now do you understand?"

"No! Lewisite? Never heard of it! What—what does it do?"

"It kills you, that's all. If you put three drops on your skin and don't rub them off,

you'll die, and people will call it heart failure. Three little blisters don't attract any attention. No doctors, no coroners, have been trained as yet to identify skin-blisters with this deadly gas. It's an absolutely new thing—safe, quick, certain. That's the kind of a weapon I was attacked with—three drops of lewisite on my bare arm, while I lay there pretending to be asleep."

"But—you're alive yet!"

"Yes, because I rubbed the stuff off as soon as I'd settled the hash of my assailant. If I'd left it there, as a sleeping person would—well, you'd have made another hundred thousand dollars, that's all."

"As God lives, I knew absolutely nothing of all this! But tell me, how can you be certain?"

"Funny thing how poetic justice works out!" laughed Forrester. "Among the pamphlets left to me by Dr. Veazey in his will was one issued by the Chemical Foundation, containing the testimony given by General Fries, chief of the Chemical Warfare Service of the United States Army, before the Dye Embargo Committee of the United States Senate, on August 4, 1921. On page 13 I came across an account of lewisite. I read it about a month ago. When I got hold of that syringe, and saw where I'd been burned, I put two and two together, that's all. This morning a chemist on India Street analyzed a drop of the stuff for me. Yes, it's lewisite, all right enough! Now have you anything to offer before I go back to Station K and start a little third-degree stuff that will bring out the connection between those murders and the Fiduciary?"

"You—you aren't going to do that? For God's sake!"

Forrester laughed and reached for his hat.

"Wait, Forrester! Hold on—be reasonable! Think of the scandal—the wreck of this business—the policy-holders who will suffer—the—"

"I'm thinking of those who have been murdered in cold blood. I'm thinking of those, now living, who may still be murdered if I don't jam this matter through to a finish!"

"Yes, but—wait!"

VII

"No need to wait!" sounded a voice at the merchant's back.

Forrester whipped around. Dr. Grundlach was standing there, an odd smile on

his thick, rather sensual lips. Noiselessly he had opened the door and noiselessly he had entered.

"What?" demanded Edgerton. "You—you're against me, too? You want to rush this thing through before it's been sifted? You bring accusations which, true or false, will wreck the company and—"

"Not at all. I shall bring no accusations except against the guilty man, who is now in this room."

"What d'you mean?" ejaculated Edgerton, the veins swelling on his neck, his fist clenched. "Are you accusing *me*—of murder?"

"Naturally I heard something of what was going on in this office," the doctor said in level tones, ignoring Mogul's question. "Naturally I knew the whole affair had been discovered; so I came in here to offer terms of compromise. After all, why ruin a long-established business that has been saved by such drastic measures? Why injure a lot of innocent people whose investments have been protected by the death of several others, equally innocent?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed Forrester, his eyes gleaming. "Doctor, your villainy is equalled only by your hard common sense. What do you offer?"

"I am a large stockholder in this concern," said Grundlach, a little unsteadily. He leaned against the table, as if to hold himself up. "The company was in danger of investigation by the State insurance commissioner—possibly of bankruptcy. I am an expert chemist. I applied the resources of science, that is all. My coworker, a clever fellow named Scheffel, who did all the jobs at a reasonable figure, understands perfectly well what to do if given the opportunity to escape the electric chair. Your cleverness, Mr. Forrester, will cooperate to protect the company. As for me, well—"

He drew up his right sleeve. Three red spots burned on the forearm, the triple mark of death.

"My God!" gulped Edgerton. "What—what have you done?"

"Only the obvious thing. I'll be gone

in thirty minutes or so." He leaned still more heavily on the table. "We never reckoned on meeting an intelligence superior to our own. We misplayed—that's all!"

He paused, breathing heavily, and passed a hand over his eyes, as if to clear away a mist. Edgerton, his face ashen, stared with horror. His lips quivered, but he could utter no word. Forrester leaned a little forward, cool to the marrows.

"What an extraordinarily interesting case!" he murmured.

"Is it not?" smiled the doctor grimly.

"I ask you, as payment for it, to avoid all publicity. I have—dependents. Their welfare rests on my stock in this company remaining a good investment, as I—have made it. Beyond that, nothing matters to me. Let me go—just one more case of—heart failure." Grundlach was panting now, but still holding himself. "Will you, Mr. Forrester, attend to—Scheffel?"

Forrester nodded. He picked up the glass-barreled syringe from the desk, slipped it back into its case, and pocketed it. Then he put on his overcoat and took his hat.

"At once!" he promised.

Horried, his face a mask of terrible emotions, President Edgerton slumped into his chair and sagged there, a wreck of a man. The doctor laughed weakly as he turned back toward his office.

"I prefer to die in my own quarters," he gasped. "More appropriate, somehow. Gentlemen—good day!"

He stumbled through the door, helping himself with his hands like a paralytic. He disappeared.

"Don't go!" whispered Edgerton in a hoarse tremble. "For God's sake, Forrester, don't leave me—just yet!"

"Sorry," smiled Forrester, "but poetic justice, whose agent Dr. Veazey's will has made me, requires my immediate presence elsewhere. Scheffel will be expecting me. I have a gift to make him, in a very private manner. I wish you good day!"

He left Edgerton in a collapse, and fared forth on his final errand of justice immutable alike to innocence and guilt.

THE GREAT GAME

THOSE whom ill fortune cannot break or bend
Are often victors ere the long years end.
Those who shun obstacles and shrink from strife
Are only dummies in the game of life.

William Hamilton Hayne

The Cheerful Liar

A TALE WORTH READING IN A TIME OF BUSINESS DEPRESSION

By Conrad Richter

THAD TREXLER, the "son" of Trexler & Son, proprietors of the Washblack Hosiery Company, whistled cheerily all the way up the home street from the station. Once safe behind the door of the office, however, the tune was summarily abandoned.

"If I'd had to do it another square, Dockey, I'd 'a' choked!" he confided to the sturdy girl knitting beside her covered typewriter.

"I didn't know you could do even that much for appearances, Thad," she replied, an amused glint in her blue eyes. "You're improving!"

"Like a fish learning to swim in the Sahara Desert!" he retorted. "That's the hosiery market to-day—deader than a catacomb, whatever that is. The only man who could sell it anything is the undertaker."

"Thad!" gently reproved the girl.

"I'm telling you—and you won't believe it!" he protested. "The building on lower Fifth Avenue that the Blosser Wholesale Company's in, has over a hundred hosiery jobbers. Not one 'll touch a box of socks if you give it to him free and make it his size into the bargain!"

"They might talk that way," admitted the knitting skeptic; "but if you went to them talking the other way—"

"I was waiting for something like that!" he informed her vigorously. "I'll tell you right now nobody ever blew into New York practising what you preach more than yours truly. I admit you almost had me believing the stuff. 'I'm no pessimist!' I pumped into myself every rail-click from Bethlehem to Jersey City. 'I'm cheerful! I'm confident! I'm going to collect that twenty-two hundred from the Blosser Wholesale or split! I can do it because I'm happy and looking on the bright side!' I whistled 'Yankee Doodle' on the ferry-boat, and looked pleasant to people in the subway,

and said good morning to an elevator man with a face like a snapping turtle. Did it work, Dockey? Did it? I'm asking you! D'you want to bet on it?"

"If it didn't—" serenely began the girl.

"You said it!" declared the youth. "Got it right on the first guess! It didn't. First thing Blosser handed me was the innocent remark that enough hosiery's lying around in warehouses to walk the population of the earth to the moon Sundays and week-days till Christmas. The next bouquet was a sweet little memo charging back to the Washblack Hosiery Company the sum of twenty-two hundred dollars which little me went over there to collect. Blosser had sold the whole batch to a chain store in Chicago, and the chain store was shooting it back to papa—nineteen slapping cases by freight!"

The girl's cheery blue eyes had opened a trifle wider, but her moving hands continued unaffected.

"Well, we have the room to store it here, haven't we?"

"Room!" exploded the youth. "With the chief sparring for time to use the money for back rent and power bills and overdue machinery instalments! And bluer the last six months than the Atlantic Ocean!"

"In that case, what color would you call his son?" wondered the girl, with a delicious glance from her jolly eyes. "Indigo, probably!" Her fingers worked steadily on. "Thad, I won't say being cheerful would sell any more hosiery, but it certainly would make life a little happier—"

"Let off, Dockey! Let off!" enjoined the youth, waving a heated hand. "You can get off that stuff to school kids and the females down at the Y. W. C. A., but not to business men. I got enough willies and blues to-day to make it rain in Albuquerque; and I'm not ashamed of 'em! Any man who'd know what I know, and

wouldn't be blue over it, wouldn't be worth the price of cough medicine to send him to heaven!"

There was the little clucking sound of knitting-needles as the girl quietly laid her sweater on the typewriter table.

"Very well, Thad—have it your way. Don't care two straws how blue you make any one feel around you, just so they are as miserable as you!" She stooped slightly to put on her hat with the aid of the mirror hanging above the files. "If you will excuse me, I would like to go out. There is really no earthly reason for me to remain here. If you imagine it is naturally cheerful sitting knitting all day in a deserted office, you're happily mistaken."

She lifted her pocketbook from the black top of the safe. Then, with a twisted little smile, she went out.

Sobered somewhat, Thad went to the window and saw her reappear on the street below. When her stocky walk had carried her out of sight behind the Wertz Piano Company's building, he turned uneasily back to the little office.

It did seem lonely and deserted. The steady roar and vibration of the job presses of the Beecher Printing Company, on the third floor, only accentuated the deathly inactivity of the Washblack Hosiery Company. The strong, pungent odor of tarred rope that seeped aloft from the Miller Cordage Company, on the first floor rear, was not particularly pleasant. Out in the mill, the rows of expensive knitting-machines, hushed, abandoned, still, completed the impression of stagnation.

At a quarter to twelve his father had not as yet appeared. Thad decided to call up the house, but before he could lift the receiver the bell called him.

"Dr. Martin speaking. Mr. Trexler, Jr., expected back from New York to-day?"

A peculiar sensation manifested itself on the youth's spine. Dr. Martin—Dorothy Martin's uncle, whereby she had attained the sobriquet of Dockey—was his father's physician.

"This is Thad now, doc," he admitted. The voice on the wire did not reassure him.

"I would like you to come to my office."

The speaker waited a brief moment, then there came a decisive little click. He had hung up.

Solemnly the youth hooked up his own receiver, and two or three minutes after-

ward he was on his way down the old boarded-up stairs.

II

It was probably the association of boyhood days when a diabolical medical instrument, coated with some vile substance, had violated the upper reaches of his nostrils. In any event, Dr. Martin's office had always seemed to Thad the earthly personification of purgatory. To-day, as he entered the vestibule, he already caught the familiar whiff of expiatory fumes.

Dr. Martin himself had constantly impressed the youth as a satyr fallen into the medical profession by mistake, who took out his revenge on whatever prey he managed to decoy to his den. He was a little man, round of abdomen, sharp of eye, and blunt of tongue. He received Thad Trexler expressionlessly.

"Do you happen to realize where your father stands to-day, young man?"

It was a broadside that shook the apprehensive youth's inmost fortifications. He started to explain that he had not as yet seen his parent, but the other interjected with slight scorn that he did not refer to geographic considerations.

"Your father, young man," murmured the physician with professional regret, "has perhaps six months to live. It may be a trifle less, it may be a trifle more—that is an approximate estimate. I have not told him as yet, but there is no reason why some member of his family should not know the truth."

The stunned youth on the white revolving stool tried to take it bravely.

"Six months, doc?" he managed. "Why, I didn't know anything was wrong with him!"

"Bankruptcy," crisped the little doctor. "Physical, not financial. It kills more men than bullets, though it doesn't always pull the trigger. Usually it prefers to let the kidneys or arteries or some virulent infection do the dirty work."

"But, doc!" protested the stricken youth hopefully. "Now that you know about it, can't you give him something—"

The physician's smile was grim.

"If any man has discovered nature's formula for manufacturing nerve energy, young man, he's kept the world in the dark about it. When your flivver leaks gas faster than you can buy it on the road, what do you do to it—give it some pills?"

The boy shook his head, moistening his lips.

"I should hope not!" snorted the physician. "You have one chance, and you know it—stop the leak!" He pressed his lips together. "That's the one chance you have with your father—stop the nerve energy leak; and your telling him to stop it will get you just about as far as swearing at your flivver. It isn't done that way. You've got to get out your wrench and fix something. In your father's case, what you want to tighten up is his worry nut. Your wrench is your mouth. The way you take hold of a worry nut is—smile! Tell him pleasant things! Remind him the sun is out. Make a guess that it's going to be cooler to-morrow. Tell him strengthening things. Compliment him on looking well. Make him believe he can do things better than you or anybody else. Tell him business is fine, and—"

"But that's just it, doc—it isn't fine!" protested the perspiring Thad.

"Of course it isn't!" thundered the physician. "Who said it was?" He isn't looking well, either. That's no excuse for mooning over it. If your carbureter's leaking like a gas main, you don't sit down and look glum and say, 'Too bad you're going to blow up, old top!' I should say not! You get busy and patch it up, and say, 'You're fixed!' Don't you?"

The unhappy youth gulped.

"But there's nineteen—"

"I don't care if there's a hundred and nineteen!" exploded the doctor. "What do you consider important—nineteen thingumabobs, or your father lying flat on his back in a—"

"I see, doc!" hastily choked Thad.

Dr. Martin rose.

"Let's hope so. It's up to you now to fix it. Nobody else can; and if you fall down, you probably won't get another chance. Come back in a week and tell me what you're doing. Meantime keep it dark—particularly from your father, your mother, and Dorothy."

He proceeded to dismiss the lad by simply turning his back.

III

It was half an hour later when Thad came to himself wandering around downtown. He had not cared to get anywhere—he just wanted time to think. Plain as billboards now loomed the accumulating trou-

ble signs that he had failed to read—his father's inability to sleep, his getting up from the table with an unemptied plate—why, Thad remembered the time when he'd have been licked for leaving anything on his plate!—the lines that were aging his face, his worried smile.

Thad hadn't heard the B flat key on the piano vibrate to his father's hearty laugh for nearly a year. Somehow the memory of that vanished laugh brought all the boy's latent filial tenderness welling up within him. Resolutely his feet turned toward home.

The brick row house with its terra-cotta-colored blinds, its second-story bay window, and its few square feet of terraced lawn, seemed like some redoubtable fortress as he approached it. He found his father moodily setting down figures on the back of an envelope in the dim cave of the long, narrow living-room.

"Howdy, chief?" he hailed with all the buoyancy at his command.

His voice sounded in his ear like a clattering cymbal. To cover his confusion, he waved to his mother sitting alone at the dinner-table, which was still set.

"Hello, lady!"

That sounded better. Encouraged, he looked again at his father.

"Well, chief, I came home without the cash, but we should worry! I tell you things are starting to look up over in New York!"

The expression of mingled surprise and doubt on his father's face was worth something to see.

"Even the hosiery business?" he asked incredulously.

"Every kind," declared the youth, blindly cutting all ties and plunging into the icy stream. "Nobody's rushing hard just yet to buy heavy, you understand. They think prices are still coming down; but their stocks are getting mighty low. First thing they know, they'll be hollering for stock all together, and the Washblack Hosiery Company 'll have to put on a night shift to catch up. It's expected to come almost any minute!"

His father had dropped his envelope and was regarding his son with almost childish attention. Carried away by his audience, Thad went on enthusiastically.

"The big bankers down in New York, chief, are saying good times are right around the corner—the best this country

ever saw. They claim everybody soon 'll be so busy. People will be wishing for the vacation that you and I have right now without appreciating it!"

Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed his mother draw noiselessly up to listen. Turning quickly, he surprised her with a buoyant hug and a resounding kiss.

"Holy Pat, it's great to be home, lady! I tell you right now you've got to go away to appreciate your father and mother!" He caressed her shoulder with emphatic pats. "And you've got to travel some, I'm telling you, to find a home to beat this. Look at those fancy pictures—and that handsome leather set—and these slapping big rugs! You can buy furniture in the store, lady, but you can't buy it doped out like you've got it."

Thad gazed admiringly around the room. His father's glance followed slowly, thoughtfully, as if for the first time he had become aware of certain furnishings which he had seen every day since business had gone to the dogs.

"Thad!" suddenly accused his mother. "You haven't had dinner yet! Here I am making company out of you when you probably didn't get anything good to eat since you went off!"

"Beefsteak!" exclaimed her son, following to the dining-room. "Mashed potatoes and gravy! Holy Pat, lady! This is no dinner—it's a Shriner banquet!"

He washed his hands at the kitchen sink, drying them with the crash towel on the faithful nail. Then, hands in pockets, he stood bending over the gas-range, drawing in ardent breaths of pan and boiler, praising the emanating flavors. Out of the corner of his eye he watched his father appear in the kitchen doorway.

"Say, lady!" he whispered. "Doesn't the chief look good, though? I don't remember him looking so young since I was a kid."

Before his mother could reply, he launched into something else. Five minutes later he triumphantly bore the platter of warmed steak to the dining-room, followed by his mother with the old white-flecked dish of snowy potatoes and the flowered bowl of steaming gravy. His father, drawn after them as if by a magnet, watched Thad tuck in his napkin and exclaim rapturously over the wonder of a mouth full of scrambled potato, gravy, steak, and bread and butter.

"Sally," hemmed the elder Trexler, "I believe I can eat a little more myself, if you get me something to eat it on."

Flushed with his initial success, Thad worked his brain for the next move.

"Say, chief!" he exclaimed earnestly. "Coming over in the train to-day I met a man who reminded me of you. Knew he was somebody the minute I saw him. Found out afterward he was one of the big men out in Chicago. I never expected he'd know the Washblack Hosiery Company, but blamed if his wife hadn't got some Washblack socks for him out in Chicago."

"Out in Chicago!" repeated his father, holding a crust of buttered bread suspended six inches from his mouth.

"He said," declared Thad, "those Washblack were the best socks for the money he ever got. His wife especially liked the way they came through the wash."

The crust of buttered bread proceeded unsteadily to its destination. The head of the Washblack Hosiery Company turned exultant eyes to Thad's mother. In one of his cheeks a faint spot of color had suddenly appeared.

"I forgot his name, as usual," concluded Thad, diving hastily into his plate; "but I've heard the name of his corporation before. He's the general manager."

"You never told me, Jim," exclaimed Mrs. Trexler, "that you sold stockings out in Chicago!"

"Nineteen cases," nodded the father. "Blosser sold 'em. They all went to a chain store." He wiped his plate clean with a swab of bread and scrubbed his mustache with his napkin. "How did things look down at the mill, son?"

"Never looked better!" came back Thad, engaged in the construction of a canal of gravy in his third helping of mashed potatoes. "I tell you, chief, we've got some mill! As nice a lot of machines as you'll see anywhere. I just had to stand and look at 'em to-day."

His father pushed back his chair. The second cheek was now tinged with color.

"Believe I'll run down a while," he decided. "You can come after you talk with mama a little."

"You bet!" assured Thad, his face over his plate. "I'll be there with bells on soon as I clean up this table!"

His father, with his coat off, was busily pottering around in the mill when Thad arrived; but what satisfaction he might

have had in the sight was speedily liquidated by Dockey.

"I have almost decided, Thad, to tell your father I am leaving," she announced simply over her nearly completed sweater.

He turned to her in astonishment.

"I cannot see why I should accept wages from your father for sitting here doing nothing," she continued quietly.

"Holy Pat, Dockey!" he expostulated. "We must have somebody here to answer the phone—and if anybody comes." His voice became encouraging. "You won't have to sit quiet long. The bankers in New York are looking for good business."

"The bankers, yes," she replied spiritlessly. "What do they know about it?"

He gazed at her with growing uneasiness.

"Why, they have their fingers right on the whole blamed country's throat!" he declared.

Assuming an overpowering confidence, yet keeping his voice out of hearing of his father in the mill, he set about to convince her. It would never do to have a gloomy Dockey spoiling his efforts. How in the world had he managed to embitter her so that morning? She had never even professed to see a cloud in the sky before.

But his argument, his cheerfulness, and his eloquence proved unavailing. He gave up at last with as much graciousness as he could muster.

"All right, Dockey! Wear your dark glasses if you think you'll get light-struck without 'em; but don't put the damper on the furnace around the chief. If he asks you anything, talk optimistic. Maybe you won't feel like it, but a little lie like that won't hurt you."

Dockey, her face bent low over her knitting, reluctantly nodded, and Thad with some surprise congratulated himself that, after all, he had accomplished something. The thought elated him. He got up and stretched his spinal column to an added height commensurate with his sense of accomplishment. If it wasn't for those nineteen returning cases, he believed he could actually feel hopeful.

During the fifth or sixth subsequent moment of exhilaration, like a hurtling baseball the miraculous idea struck him. He gasped at its utter simplicity. Why in seven heavens had he never thought of it before?

Without excuse or explanation he bolted from the mill. Within a few moments he

had talked confidentially with Rudder, the transfer man, and Charlie Hoffman, the local freight agent.

IV

For the rest of the week Thad's heart felt the size of a circus-tent. He radiated such genuine warmth and continuous cheer that one morning his father came down to the mill at eight o'clock, and another day he actually returned home late for lunch. As for Thad, he was existing in Eden. Nothing further was desirable except that there should be no misunderstanding—no miscarriage at the freight-house.

On Wednesday he received a personal telephone-call from the transfer office, and in half an hour he had visited the Columbus Warehouse in company with Rudder.

"There they are—the whole nineteen boxes!" proudly indicated the transfer man. "Couldn't be safer from your pop if they were at the north pole!"

"Holy Pat, Rudder, it's good to see 'em!" breathed Thad. "I just got to you and Hoffman in time."

He left Rudder's truck at Third and Penn, and whistled up Court Street to the mill, ending in an irrepressible clog dance on the office floor. At the sound, his father came to the mill door to investigate.

"What's the matter with you, Thad?" he wondered.

"Can't a fellow let off a little energy on a fine day like this?" exuberantly demanded the son.

"A what kind of day?" repeated his parent, glancing out of the window, then back to his son. "Why, it's still raining!"

"It isn't raining rain to me," explained Thad buoyantly. "It's raining water—drinking-water when I'm thirsty, hot water when I want to take a bath, river water when I want to go canoeing. Dockey and I are going up the river to-night. It's full moon to-morrow."

"You can't go up the river in this rain!" informed his father. "You'll get wet to the skin."

"It isn't going to rain to-night!" explained Thad fluently. "The sun's coming out." He turned delectably on the girl, whom, out of the corner of his eye, he had seen halt her knitting. "Isn't it, Dockey?"

"If you say so, Thad," she replied, hastening to return to her sweater.

"I absolutely predict it," he grinned. "But," he continued blithely, "if it doesn't

come out to-day, it will to-morrow—and to-morrow night's full moon, anyway. So we should worry! But," he added confidently, "I'm pretty willing to bet it's coming out to-day!"

His offer found no takers. It was still raining at three o'clock when his father entered the office from the mill to investigate the afternoon mail.

"Only a trade journal," he muttered, disappointed. "I thought Blosser might mail in that check."

"For all you know, chief," suggested Thad exuberantly, "that trade journal might be worth a couple of twenty-two-hundred-dollar checks. It might have an idea in it worth ten thousand! That Chicago business man I rode over with from New York the other week told me he got a notion out of a magazine that got their company a hundred thousand dollars' worth of new business."

His father picked up the magazine doubtfully, settled himself on his flat-top desk, and reached for his glasses.

"You're talking pretty big lately, son—such things as the sun coming out when you want it, and a hundred-thousand-dollar batch of business!"

"A hundred thousand—that's nothing!" declared Thad, warming up to his mythical general manager from Chicago. "He told me he had got more than half that out of New York in one day! Made me think of what mother used to say about you—you used to be the best dry-goods salesman out of Philadelphia!"

"Not the best, I guess, son," hastened his father, although his eyes showed that he was pleased. "But I used to sell some goods between Scranton and—" He halted in honest emotion, relapsing, when he did speak, into Pennsylvania Dutch. "*Mer-maint mermiss! Meiner sehl! Sheer gohr!*"

Startled, Thad followed his parent's eyes. His heart soared. Although it was still faintly raining, through the breaking clouds in the west the sun was threatening to shine.

"Right on time, chief!" he cried gaily. "Everything comes to him who expects it." He caught hold of the girl's hand. "Come on, Dockey! We've got to start in five minutes, if you and I are eating supper at the Palisade Spring."

Under the triple stimulus of a successful weather prophecy, the returned hosiery safely disposed of, and his father on the

road to improvement, Thad found himself in high feather. He teased and chuckled, complimented and flattered, and promised more good things to come to pass to Dockey and the Washblack Hosiery Company than any generously prepaid fortune-teller at the fair. His companion simply could not help responding to his humor, and they narrowly made the last Riverside car.

Wholesomely tired after walking from Dockey's house on Franklin Street, he found himself too sleepy to perform even his nightly ablutions. He tumbled straight into bed, and the day was already hot when he awoke. From its resting place on the floor beside the bed, his watch, a high school graduation gift from his parents, informed him that it was a quarter to nine o'clock.

"You've got to get up earlier than this to keep up with your father!" his mother twitted him portentously, when he arrived in the kitchen. "He went to New York this morning on the early train."

Had the ceiling fallen on his head, Thad could not have received a more pitiless blow. Like a wrecked soap-bubble, his ardor for breakfast collapsed and vanished into thin air.

"Chief—New York, lady?" he repeated thickly.

"Doesn't it surprise you, too?" rejoiced his mother. "I could tell he was thinking of something when he came home from the mill last night. He acted like a boy. Then at supper he told me." She nodded impressively. "He believes he can sell Mr. Blosser some more stockings."

Thad's heart turned sick. The impulse came to him to catch the Valley Queen for New York; but a hasty calculation told him that his father would have heard the worst at least two hours before his own train reached the shed at Jersey City.

He looked at his watch—five minutes past nine! Already his father was probably walking into Blosser's office.

To keep from alarming his mother, he forced down what breakfast he could, then hurried to apprise Dr. Martin. To his surprise, the office door was locked. Presently the eye specialist across the hall informed him that Dr. Martin was out of town and would not be back until late Sunday.

Sickened and shaken of nerve, Thad did not go home to dinner. In the afternoon he ventured to the station on the chance that his disillusioned parent might come

back on the four-o'clock train; but that train came in, and the evening train, and the head of the Washblack Hosiery Company had not returned.

Thad slept little that night. From seven o'clock the following morning until half past eight that night, no trains from New York entered the station without his tense figure waiting on the platform, anxiously scanning every moving face.

V

ON the third day, returning unsuccessfully from the noon train, Thad found a telegram at the office.

Meet your father at station to-night six fifteen.
ALBERT BLOSSER.

He stared at the typewritten words, their full import reaching his consciousness. It was like finally hearing the delayed and dreaded verdict of a jury. Haggard, he put his face quietly in his hands.

"Thad! What is it?"

He heard Dockey's voice with its old-time vigor—then her quick heel-clicks across the floor. Without raising his head, he handed her the yellow telegram. She could not understand it. In the end he had wretchedly to unbosom the whole affair. From his telephone-call from Dr. Martin to his tragic discovery on the morning after the canoe ride, he omitted nothing.

Hearing no response when he had finished, he glanced up. To his surprise, Dockey had turned tensely to the wall.

"Oh, Thad!" she begged him in mysterious agitation. "Please don't ask me anything!"

He got to his feet, perplexed. At the same time a door banged down-stairs in the hall. A storm was coming up out of the west, but it wasn't the storm that had clattered the door.

Steps came from the stairs. The steps were curiously slow and heavy, but there was a familiar measure to them that Thad could not but recognize. The steps halted at the hall door, which, after a moment, opened.

Thad instinctively knew who had opened it—the returned head of the Washblack Hosiery Company, thinner, tired-looking, his summer-weight black suit hanging about him like a damp bag.

"Chief!" stammered his son.

His father, bracing up, gave him a curious searching glance.

"What's the matter? Can't an old man come home a bit tired from going around New York night and day trying to sell hosiery?"

The two young people exchanged wretched glances.

"D-didn't Blosser tell you yet?" floundered Thad.

His father's perspired face relaxed.

"Well, it might be good he didn't—at first. He said he thought I knew it. The only thing he told me was what he probably told you, I've been surmising since." He gazed at his son shrewdly. "He said the hosiery market was deadlier than the middle of the Sahara Desert, and the only man who could sell it anything would be the undertaker!"

Thad dropped his eyes. His father's widening grin emphasized his lean knob of jaw.

"Well, when he said that, it didn't gee with what you told me. 'Al,' I replied, 'I'll take you up. I'm no undertaker, but, panic or no panic, if an old dry-goods drummer can't stir up a little business in a big town like this, he ought to be ready for the undertaker!' He tried to get me out of the notion, but one of his men gave me a list of names. I saw right away, the minute I came in, these new-fangled kind of young buyers didn't look cracked on making much fuss over me. So, without paying much attention to anybody, I sat myself down on the floor beside their desk and started to unlace my shoe. It took me a little while. Then, when my shoe was off, I pulled off my sock. 'Gentlemen,' I said, getting up in my bare foot, 'here's a sock my wife's washed eight times. She scrubbed it on a washing-board a carpenter could file a saw on. She swabbed it with enough yellow laundry soap to take the skin off my face. Gentlemen, I ask you to hold that sock up to God's daylight. If it's lost one fleck of color from an honest-to-God black, I want you to keep it as a souvenir of the rube salesman who tried to sell you a fake, and I'll walk back home barefooted!'"

The eyes of the returned head of the Washblack Hosiery Company twinkled. He put down his bag and pulled up both trouser legs.

"Still there yet, you notice," he observed grimly. He shook down the trouser legs. "Dockey, if you've got that list of addresses handy, you might call up the help and tell 'em their pay starts when the Penn

Hardware whistle blows to-morrow morning. If they want to know for how long, tell 'em pretty long, because a little mill like ours is small potatoes beside the big buyers down in New York."

With deliberate enjoyment he drew off his coat.

"Son, you might phone your mama first that we won't be home for supper. She'll probably start an argument, so you might as well tell her the old dry-goods drummer got back, and before starting up to-morrow we're going to roll up the mill to-night and shake it out of the window!"

Thad exchanged a meaning glance with the girl.

"Listen, chief," he began smoothly. "I can get everything ready myself down here. You're all tired out from your trip. You go home and rest up. Why, if the doctor saw you—"

"Doctor!" bristled his father. "What doctor?"

"Why, Dockey's uncle, Dr. Martin," replied Thad, surprised.

"Him!" exclaimed his father. "I haven't been around Jerry Martin since I had a boil last summer. What does he have to do with me? Now I want you two to go ahead and do what I told you."

In definite finality he opened the door to the mill. Dumfounded, Thad watched him go. Starting mechanically after him a moment later, he found the soft, blue-clad form of Dockey blocking his way.

"Don't say any more, Thad!" she whispered. Then, at the complete bewilderment in his eyes, her own fell. Pale areas appeared on her face, except at her plumply padded cheek-bones where red spots glowed. "I know you'll never forgive Uncle Jerry,

Thad; but it was all my fault! He wouldn't do it at first. Then I told him how you were just making everybody's life miserable. That made him mad. I told him I was sure your father wouldn't mind if he ever found out. Don't you remember that day I got up and went out when you came back from New York so blue? I went straight to Uncle Jerry's office. Do you remember, Thad?"

There was no reply from the frozen listener. The girl came closer.

"That's why I acted blue myself after that—just to give you somebody to practise on. I knew you wouldn't want me to be gloomy around your father. Oh, Thad, don't get cross now if I have to smile, but you did it so beautifully! Every day I was afraid you'd catch my eyes twinkling."

The overwhelmed youth tried to say something, but the blanket of mingled resentment, respect, and shame was too thick. The girl took his hand wistfully.

"Aren't you even a little bit glad, Thad, it was a fraud—so that there isn't really anything wrong with your father to worry about?"

He started to answer, but the storm took the words out of his mouth. A rousing clap of thunder shook a splatter of rain-drops through the open window.

Hurrying to rescue her sweater from being blown from the sill, the girl raised her strong young arms to lower the sash. Thad, automatically watching her, told himself he had never seen a more buoyant portrait of a young girl's strength.

"Leave it open, Dockey!" he called on impulse. "It isn't raining rain to your sweater. Besides, the sun 'll come out to-day or to-morrow!"

TO A NEW POET

SING, if you will, the many ways of state,
Sing how men climb by stratagems to power;
Let fancy rise on wings to heights elate
And send down music in a golden shower.

Sing marvels men have known by land and sea,
Sing clever turns that mine and countermines;
Sing that which was and is and still must be—
Sing all that dreams imagine, hearts divine!

Then, soaring at your highest, poet, sing *
How simple goodness is the greater thing!

Harry Kemp

Treasure Royal

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—A STORY OF THE GOLDEN HOARD
OF THE ANCIENT KINGS OF ANAM

By H. Bedford-Jones

WILLIAM KENT mechanically accepted the letter which the desk clerk handed him. Some unpaid bill that he had left behind him in Manila, perhaps; but no—the letter was from French Indo-China, and was postmarked "Hué." It was addressed to "M. William Kent, Grand Hôtel de l'Europe, Singapore."

"Who the devil is writing me from Indo-China?" thought Kent.

He was about to tear at the envelope when he heard his name spoken.

"Mr. Kent?"

He turned. A singularly handsome man stood at his elbow—a man whom he had met at the Cricket Club on the previous day. He could not remember the name, but the other caught his hesitation and laughed gaily.

"Paléologue—a name to trip the British tongue, eh? Pardon me—I was seeking a fourth at bridge, if you would care to join us. Undoubtedly you are the William Kent who writes books upon ethnology and kindred sciences? I have read some of them. The honor of meeting you, sir, is impressive."

Paléologue bowed. Kent could not grasp the man at all. This air of debonair gaiety left him in doubt whether the stranger was jesting or not. Scientific books! The thought made Kent chuckle to himself.

"Bridge, eh?" he returned. "Thanks very much—yes, I'd be glad to sit in for an hour."

He turned and accompanied Paléologue, thrusting the unopened letter into his pocket.

No one, seeing William Kent thus lodged at the finest hotel in Singapore, wearing purple and fine linen, surrounded by every luxury, and not working a stroke, would have guessed how nearly desperate was the

American. Only a year before he had had a flourishing export business of his own in Manila. A crooked financier had ruined him; a selfish woman had embittered him.

He wandered to Singapore, after vainly attempting to settle down or get back into business, and here he went into rubber speculation with what little money he had left. This was toward the end of 1920, when the rubber panic struck Malaya like a whirlwind, and Kent went down at the first crash.

Having insight, business acumen, and a small stake left, he went "short" on the chance that still worse would come. It came. Kent emerged with a thousand dollars in cash, a distaste for Singapore and rubber, and an urge to wander somewhere else.

At this juncture came the letter from Hué and Michael Paléologue. Both were agents of fate.

Kent followed his new friend to one of the terraces overlooking St. Andrew's Road and Raffles Plain. Out beyond, over Connaught Drive, with its sweeping trees and croquet-wire fencing, glittered the waters of the harbor. Here, at a table in a pleasant corner, he was introduced to two other men. One of them was a Frenchman—or rather a Provençal—Davignan by name. An immense fat fellow this, with cherubic, smiling features, trim black mustache and napoleon; a cordial and impressive person. The other was a silent Englishman.

Paléologue introduced Kent as the famous ethnologist, and from the man's gay manner Kent let the joke pass. Boston had endowed him with a broad "a" which often made men think him English.

From the very start, Kent's cards were abominable, his luck worse. The stakes were high enough to surprise him, but he

was game. He passed into the reckless, defiant mood of the man who gambles.

Aside from this, he was interested in the two men, Paléologue and Davignan. They seemed to be engaged in a merry game of war under the surface—a gay defiance, a mutual challenge; yet outwardly they were very friendly.

Between the cards, the table talk conveyed much information to Kent. He discovered that this Paléologue was some sort of nobleman; just what, he could not ascertain. The man spoke all languages and appeared to be a cosmopolitan. He and Davignan were both bound north to French Indo-China. The fat Provençal said very little about himself, however, except when Kent made some remark about the beauty of the scene before them.

"Ah!" Davignan looked wistfully over the brilliant scene. "You think this beautiful? You should see the sweet *saladelles*, the green slopes of the Étang de Vaccarès, the flamingoes with their pink wings—"

"Bah!" Michael Paléologue snapped his fingers gaily. "You and your salt desert of Provence! Nothing in that country but ruined cities and false legends and wild cattle, my countrymen of Mistral! You lack imagination."

Kent impulsively spoke up, moved by something he saw in the eyes of the fat Davignan.

"Imagination! You have too much of it, Paléologue. If I had as much as you have—"

He paused. The bold, dark eyes of Paléologue swept him mockingly.

"Yes?" came the smooth voice. "And what would you do then?"

Kent chuckled.

"Faith, I'd get rich in a hurry!"

"Tell me how, and I will accomplish it," retorted Paléologue, a thrust of rather disagreeable challenge in his voice. "I should like to be rich—in a hurry!"

"Easily told!" Kent shrugged. "I'd go up north and rob Hué of the treasure of the Anamese kings. That would be a man's job!"

The eyes of Paléologue danced upon him.

"I accept the challenge," was the prompt retort. "I will steal this treasure!"

Davignan uttered a rumble of laughter.

"Why do you laugh, if you please?" queried Paléologue coldly.

"For two reasons." Davignan wiped mirthful tears from his fat jowl. "For two

reasons, both most excellent ones. The first, that this treasure is well guarded—by men and by walls, you conceive. Only most distinguished visitors can obtain permits to view it."

"Well, am I not distinguished?" Paléologue twisted his blond mustache with a grand air. "True, I owe a bar sinister to one of my ancestors, but otherwise—I am a Paléologue. And the second reason, my honest friend?"

"Is," said Davignan pompously, "that I am proceeding to the capital to reorganize the police of the twin colonies, as special commissioner. My work of this nature in Noumea and other colonies has been successful, and I come with full powers to act. Therefore, beware!"

Paléologue laughed gaily. Evidently he regarded Davignan as a fat cherub, while no less evidently Davignan regarded him as a merry jester. William Kent looked at the two men thoughtfully, and the frown deepened in his eyes.

"Paléologue, I withdraw the challenge," he said curtly. "You are evidently a stranger in these parts, or you would not speak so lightly of stealing that treasure. It is the greatest treasure in the south of Asia, and the best-guarded."

"The word of a prince is sacred," said Paléologue promptly, and gathered up his cards. "I refuse to withdraw it. Well, gentlemen, I bid one no trump."

There the matter ended for the present.

II

KENT rose from the game stripped clean. He made his excuses and departed; at least, he was an excellent loser. He arranged to give up his room after dinner and seek cheaper lodgings.

Behind him, the austere Englishman uttered a grunt, in response to some remark from Paléologue.

"He's not an Englishman," he returned. "Kent, the ethnologist, went to Sydney by to-day's P. and O. boat. This chap, I fancy, was an American. He didn't claim to be the scientist, did he?"

Paléologue admitted that he might have been in error. He looked a little thoughtful; so did M. Davignan. The bridge game was ended, and the players separated.

During the remainder of the afternoon, Kent made some cautious inquiries. He discovered that Paléologue bore an ancient name, and bore it without adding any luster

to its honor, yet decently enough. The source of his titles was obscure.

While he was dressing for his last dinner at the Hôtel de l'Europe, Kent found the unopened letter he had thrust into a pocket. He opened it. The letter was in neat French chirography, and Kent found himself addressed simply as "dear colleague." The text ran:

For some years we have corresponded, wherein I hold myself greatly honored. Now I find by happy accident that you are to be in Singapore, and I hasten to invite you to visit me. I am eager to meet you, dear colleague. I have some new theories in regard to the Malayan Po-se on which I am anxious to invite your comment.

If you will so greatly honor me, pray come at your convenience. We live simply, cozily, going nowhere. The railroad is finished, and you may come to Hué either from Hanoi or from Saigon. As the seat of government is in the northern capital at this season, you may find Hanoi more convenient.

I am, dear colleague, your very humble letter-friend,

JEAN MARIE MARQUET.

Kent whistled thoughtfully over this letter. Then he went down to the information desk and made some inquiries.

The result of these inquiries was fairly astonishing. Yes, Dr. Marquet was quite a famous man. He lived in Hué. His work in ethnology, particularly in Chinese ethnology, was internationally known. He was one of the great scholars of the day. And Mr. Kent, the English scientist? Unfortunately, he had made a very brief stop in Singapore. Yes, he had been at the hotel, but only that morning he had gone aboard the Peninsular and Oriental steamer for Sydney.

Kent turned away from the desk, a flame in his eyes. Why not? He had a few debts due him—enough to carry him to Hué. Why not have a go at this fabulous treasure of the Anamese kings, now under French watch and ward?

He was finished here—done for. He would go first to Saigon and make one last effort to get into some steady business. If he failed, he would strike back at the world.

"I'll go visit Marquet," he resolved, as his determination settled. "He and the other William Kent have never met, fortunately. I can bluff it out—get some of his books and read up on the subject."

All through dinner he thought over his new idea. Everybody had heard of the Anamese treasure; with the use of brains, it could be lifted.

Kent was in a savagely defiant mood. The criminality of his resolve was shaken from his broad shoulders, scarcely realized. It was hardly theft to take the hoarded treasure of ancient yellow kings. If it was, then theft be damned! He would do it. Nothing else was left him.

He was leaving the dining-room when he met Paléologue, who bowed mockingly.

"Ah! I perceive that I erred in mistaking you for the English scientist, Mr. Kent."

Kent stiffened, gave the other man look for look.

"Erred?" he said. "I don't understand you."

Paléologue stared for a moment.

"The scientist left for Sydney—"

"Missed the boat," said Kent calmly. "I'm going north to Hanoi. See you there, perhaps."

He passed on with a cool nod. So Paléologue knew that he was an impostor—or guessed it! This was all that was necessary to settle Kent's resolve. He had a fight in prospect, and he would fight. A fight for a fortune, for a king's treasure! It was worth the gamble.

Two days later Kent started for Hué.

III

"THE famous Dr. Marquet?" M. Davignan scrutinized the card. "By all means show him in without delay!"

Nearly a month had elapsed since the fat Provençal had undertaken the duties of his office in Hanoi. As special commissioner, responsible only to the governor-general, Davignan had large powers. He also possessed a rare mingling of discretion and enthusiasm—two qualities which, in the right person, are highly potential.

He was fat, fat as *Tartarin*, and his black mustache and imperial accentuated the cherubic rotundity of his countenance. Already, however, the northern capital had learned to fear this mountain of flesh, who sat behind his desk in the Hôtel du Gouverneur-Général and smiled out at the botanical gardens beneath his window. Caesar was right—a lean and hungry man may well prove dangerous. A fat, smiling man, however, may well prove terrible.

Dr. Marquet was ushered into the office.

A gentle old man, this, a famous student of Asian lore, who lived in past centuries rather than in the present. Marquet could not have told you the name of the present

King of Italy; but he could tell offhand the names and deeds of the Han emperors. His writings in the *Bulletin de l'École Française de l'Extrême Orient* were eagerly awaited by scholars throughout the world.

A trifle nervous, Marquet shook the white locks from his brow and accepted the chair to which Davignan bowed him.

"Eminent sir, you honor me by this visit!" declaimed the fat man. "To think that in my humble office sits the great Marquet! I am overcome. Sir, I salute you!"

"You do me too much honor, M. Davignan," Marquet smiled. "I have come to ask you a question—confidentially, you comprehend—a question about a gentleman in Hué."

"Ah!" Davignan beamed. "The entire department is at your service, *mon-sieur*! Your question, no doubt, concerns your guest—the gentleman who calls himself M. William Kent?"

Dr. Marquet started.

"What?" he exclaimed. "By no means, *mon-sieur*! I—I—"

"We human creatures are liable to errors innumerable. Pardon me," said Davignan, and leaned back in his chair. "Pray proceed with your question. I shall not interrupt."

"No, no! You must explain your words, M. Davignan, your manner, your air of mystery!" Obviously agitated, the kindly old man regarded the commissioner with a certain stern dignity. "What mean you by such an insinuation, sir, regarding my guest?"

Davignan shrugged.

"I am sorry it slipped from my tongue," he returned. "As a matter of fact, your guest is not the man you think him. He is not the famous English ethnologist."

"Impossible!" Marquet's eyes widened. "Your statement is preposterous!"

Davignan drew forward some papers which lay upon his desk. He appeared to ignore the old scientist's agitation.

"Let us see, let us see!" he murmured. "Here is the *dossier* of M. William Kent, now a visitor in Hué. From this I ascertain that he is an American."

"*Au contraire*, an Englishman!" broke in Marquet. "A well-known Englishman, I assure you!"

"This is extraordinary!" M. Davignan pursed his lips judicially. "I find that he was born in Boston, in the department of Massachusetts. He is unmarried—record,

good. Three years ago he came to Manila and engaged in the jute business, from which he went into a general export trade. A year ago he was prosperous, and was engaged to a charming lady—but fate overwhelmed him. His fortune was swept away, the lady married another, and he became practically a homeless vagrant—"

"*Monsieur*, I beseech you!" said the scientist. "This is not the same person!"

"May I finish, if you please?" Davignan was apologetic. "During the past year he wandered from Shanghai to Singapore, in which latter place he engaged in business—again with bad luck. In fact, I met him there. Now let us pass to M. William Kent, the English ethnologist. Here is a portrait of him from the *Illustrated London News*. He is at present in Australia. You will observe that he is an elderly man."

Poor Marquet laid down the clipping of a portrait, and wiped his brow.

"This—this is horrible!" he ejaculated helplessly. "*Monsieur*, I protest that it cannot be true! M. Kent is endowed with a superb knowledge of ethnology."

"Has he not read your works?" thoughtfully asked M. Davignan. His very air was a subtle compliment. "Stay! Here is a photograph, forwarded me from Manila, of the American in question. A large business house in Saigon has asked me about him, as they wish to employ him, and I have obtained information. You will observe this photograph of the American."

Marquet glanced at the photograph, then leaned back and uttered a faint groan.

"It is the man!" he said in a stifled voice. "An impostor—that man! So much a gentleman, so learned a scholar, so fruitful in suggestion regarding my theory of the Malayan Po-se!"

His voice trailed off into silence. He stared at Davignan. In his gentle eyes was no anger, only a great fund of sorrow. In this moment one perceived the deep kindness of the old man.

"An impostor, yes," said Davignan, with a shake of the head. "He has assumed the identity of a certain Englishman. Such an assumption does not constitute a crime; what crime, then, has he committed? None. It is obvious, therefore, that he is about to commit a crime."

"Under my roof?" stammered Marquet, aghast. "But no! I have nothing to steal. Naturally, my papers and manuscripts have a certain value, yet—"

"Ah, but you have a daughter," said Davignan.

For an instant Dr. Marquet turned white. Then his lips compressed, and he replied to the gaze of the commissioner with a look of gentle dignity.

"*Monsieur*," he said earnestly, "allow me to reassure you. This American may be an impostor; he may be a potential criminal. I admit that he has deceived me grievously. None the less, do you know what my daughter said of him as she came to the train with me? '*Mon père*,' she said, 'I do not think that M. Kent is as happy as he deserves to be.' And me, M. Davignan, I say with Marie that this is not a bad man. Impostor or no, I like him."

Davignan opened his lips, then shut them again. He fully appreciated how very remarkable an utterance he had just heard. He knew a good deal about the Marquets, father and daughter. Marie Marquet was no less famous throughout the colony than her father.

Suddenly the fat man stirred, leaned forward.

"You have undoubtedly taken your guest through the royal palace?"

"Certainly. The resident has been good enough to remove any restrictions in my case. Ah, well, I am overwhelmed at this news! I do not know what to say, what to do—"

"Say nothing," said Davignan. "Do nothing."

"What? But how can—"

Davignan, smiling, leaned forward and spoke very impressively.

"My dear sir, perhaps this American has chosen to be a scientist; perhaps you have converted him to the cause of ethnology. How are we to say? In such case it were a pity for us to cast him down. You yourself aver that he has done no wrong. Now that was exactly what was said by the Roman procurator, Pilate—you remember? Exactly! Assuredly you would not desire to be a Pilate? Certainly not; nor would I be in the position of a Caiaphas!"

Dr. Marquet listened to this astonishing historical parallel with stupefaction. The fat man vigorously and swiftly proceeded with his theme.

"You and I, we are men of the world, no? Well, this American has done no wrong, has perpetrated no crime. Perhaps he has reasons, after all, for impersonating the Englishman—reasons, that is to say,

outside the criminal law. Can one blame him for being seduced by your writings, by your personality, by your superb expositions of the ethnology of vanished peoples? Of a truth, no. *Saperlipopette!* Would you do the poor man a positive injury?"

Marquet was helpless, bewildered.

"What, then, would you have me do?"

"Nothing. I have warned you—that is sufficient. You have responded that you deem the man a gentleman—that is sufficient. Name of a name! There is no more to say. Dismiss it!" Davignan dismissed it with a florid gesture. "When do you return to Hué?" he demanded.

"I—I am not certain," stammered Marquet. "There were proofs for the *École Française*—I forgot to bring them. I have wired Marie to read and forward them. I must wait until they arrive."

"When you go," said Davignan, "may I have the honor of sending, by your hands, a number of very rare flowers to your charming daughter? I have done much walking in these beautiful grounds"—he waved his hand toward the window, which opened on the famed botanical gardens—"and I have heard much of the young lady. My family is in Saigon; I am deprived of my own beautiful children. Therefore, as a father, I express the wish! Let me know before you depart, and I shall do the rest."

"*Monsieur*, it is too good of you!" returned Marquet, his gentle features warming. Then his face changed. "Ah! The question which I desired to ask you—"

"I am entirely at your service."

"There is a man in our city"—again Marquet looked troubled—"a man who calls himself by the name of Paléologue, and who comes to our house at times. He is a charming man. Now, as you may comprehend, I am a student. I know of no Paléologue who may rightfully lay claim to the name of the famous dynasty that ruled at Constantinople for nearly two hundred years. I believe that the last genuine descendant of the Emperor Constantine Palæologus was a Moslem, one Mohammed Pasha, who died in the time of Suleiman the Magnificent. This man claims the Byzantine titles of Prince of Achaia, Duke of Athens, Count of Santorin, and I know not what else."

M. Davignan burst into a hearty laugh.

"*Saperlipopette!* One does not travel in our French colonies under assumed titles, *monsieur!*"

"Certainly," agreed Marquet; "and yet the thing worries me. Whether he be Greek or French, English or Russian, I know not. It is very strange. Sometimes I am afraid of the man's eyes. That is all folly, I know. His titles may be of papal origin; but I desired to ask you whether you know him."

Davignan laid a fat hand on the knee of his visitor, and spoke in a confidential tone.

"Tell me, what does your daughter say of this man?"

"She says," returned Marquet, "that he is happier than he deserves to be."

Davignan grunted.

"Positively, she is an oracle, this daughter! I should like to know what she would say of my little Bigarot. Well, this Paléologue is what he claims, *monsieur*, due to a bar sinister several centuries removed. He is received in the best of society. His titles are genuine, whatever their source. Does this satisfy you?"

Marquet nodded and rose. He made hesitant farewells. M. Davignan accompanied him to the waiting carriage beside the Rivière statue, and bowed him away.

When he had returned to his own private office, Davignan smoked a cigaret thoughtfully, the wonted smile playing about his lips. There was no smile in his black eyes, however.

Presently he touched a bell that was on his desk. The door opened to admit his secretary. Davignan spoke without looking around.

"I ordered that the resident at Hué should keep me informed of all permits to visit the royal palace. One was issued some days ago to a M. Paléologue. The exact date?"

"Three days ago, *monsieur*, at seven in the evening," said the secretary promptly.

"Ah! Then *monsieur le prince* must have been dining at the Residency. Send Bigarot to me."

The secretary withdrew. A moment later the door opened silently. A voice spoke.

"*Me v'là, master!*"

This was Bigarot, a most singular man—droop-shouldered, spectacled, his mouth cut ominously thin, his chin ominously square. He was shabby and down at heel; yet, in his way, he was an eminently successful man. His one vice was silence. The only person with whom he permitted himself the liberty of liberal speech was M. Davignan.

Bigarot was new to the colony, having come here from Noumea with the fat Provençal.

"Ah, Bigarot! You have heard of M. Paléologue, Prince of Achaia?"

"Often, master," said this emotionless wooden image that bore the name of Bigarot. "Quite often. I heard of him in Marseilles. I predicted at the time that some day I should have the privilege of bringing down this aristocrat. I read it in a dream, and my dreams do not fail."

"So I understand." Davignan frowned slightly. "You plaguy reds! If I were created a marquis to-morrow, you would cheerfully hang me!"

"That would be an impossible deed for my hand, *monsieur*."

"Why so, then?"

"Because, master, on the day you become a marquis, I shall become a count at the least."

"Which is to say, never!" Davignan chuckled. "This man Paléologue is in Hué. One of the greatest treasures of Asia is also in Hué. Therefore, Bigarot, I am sending you south by the night train. You comprehend?"

"I comprehended that a fortnight ago," was the dry response, "when I read in *L'Avenir* that this aristocrat was in Anam. By the greatest treasure of Asia, master, you refer to the daughter of the famous Dr. Marquet?"

Davignan looked up, astonished.

"How? You also? *Saperliçopettel*! Since when have you come to consider men and women as other than legitimate prey for your hand?"

"I merely repeat the gossip of the bureaux." Bigarot laughed without mirth. "Besides, this accursed Paléologue is said to be a connoisseur in women."

"This is a question of the Anamese treasure."

"Oh, that changes matters! In such case, our aristocrat will not work alone." Bigarot looked at the ceiling and drew a whistling breath. "There are three excellent men here, master."

Davignan waved his hand.

"Take whom you like, do what you will; and remember, this Michael Paléologue claims to be a descendant of the Emperors of Byzantium."

Behind the thick spectacles the eyes of Bigarot flashed suddenly.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed. "Master, he is a doomed man!"

The strange creature vanished.

Left alone, Davignan thoughtfully lighted another cigaret and gazed from his window at the green splendor of the Jardin Botanique outside. The cherubic features of the fat Provençal were set in their usual smile; his plump fingers twirled at his black mustache.

"A woman trips them all," he murmured. "Had not *le bon Dieu* created Mother Eve, then Father Adam would have scaled heaven. Why do bad men love good women? Why must this Marie Marquet stand at the gateway of the royal palace like a seraph? Well, we must not meddle with the mysteries."

Presently his thoughts took another turn.

"He is a droll, this Bigarot! Me, I am glad there are aristocrats left in the world—to keep the Bigarots busy. Russia was all right, so long as she had aristocrats to kill. What a pity she did not follow the example of France—kill off the old aristocracy, and then create a new one! So, she might still be healthy!"

M. Davignan shook his head sadly, sighed, and turned to his work.

IV

THE same day that saw Dr. Marquet in Hanoi, visiting the cherubic Davignan, witnessed William Kent making confession of his imposture.

Perhaps the most cloistered and beautiful spot in all the Far East is the summer garden of the Kings of Anam, in Hué. Since the Kings of Anam have no more the powers of life and death, that summer garden has been copied. Just across the river, in the French city, lies the replica. It is upon a tiny scale, because Dr. Marquet was never a rich man.

Yet land is cheap in Indo-China, and labor cheaper; and Marie Marquet, they say, had only to draw upon the fountain of her soul to create an earthly paradise. Marie! Like a flower she was—a girl tall and slender, gold-crowned and frail.

There was nothing beautiful about her, in a physical sense. She had no queenly figure, no lovely features, you comprehend; but across her pale face lay those gray eyes of hers, a sword of finest steel. They were clear and level, and they seemed to pierce through men like a sword, quietly plumbing down into their souls and reading the hidden secrets there.

Men came frequently to the Marquet

house—good men and bad; but few attained intimacy with Marie Marquet, who ruled this house and the beautiful garden, and the city, and half the broad miles of Anam. Of these few—a curious thing!—some were evil men, who beheld in Marie's gray eyes everything that they had lost and would never find again.

These men loved the girl strangely, a deep fear growing in their hearts. It was the little shallow clerks who came once and looked into Marie's eyes, and then came no more. All this pleased gentle old Marquet, who failed to understand his daughter, but revered her deeply.

Marie cared neither for balls nor for Residency functions. Instead of going to others, she drew others to her. Men came seeking most singular things—officials who lacked skill to rule, palace mandarins who brought gifts of jade and sought help, fools who had made mistakes and needed her strength behind their weakness. All of these looked into her gray eyes and dared speak no word of love.

Kent walked with her in the garden—a sweet place, with its fragments of ancient carvings from jungled cities, its gently fastooned orchids, its stone-bordered pools, and the curious sun-dial, where a stone mandarin pointed the hours with his button. Here there was peace. In this garden of her creating, Marie Marquet moved as a flower of the ages, a frail, swaying blossom tipped with palest gold.

"Will you spend all your life here," asked Kent, his eyes less somber than usual, "reading your father's manuscripts, delving in past ages, missing the joy of life?"

"Why not?" asked the girl. Her gray eyes lay level on his, a sword of steel held athwart his gaze. "I am happy."

"Happiness ends," said Kent harshly.

"Not when it is in the heart, *monsieur*." She paused and smiled. "What do you most desire?"

Kent lifted his head. There across the river rose the imperial city, forbidden to natives. It was the most glorious bit of architecture the Chinese race ever produced. The royal tombs transcended the northern Ming tombs in splendor of conception. Not Peking in all its glory was so beautiful as this palace city of the Kings of Anam.

"Over there they are happy," said Kent abruptly. "Gold is like dross to those

mandarins. The chirping of women, the squandering of the senses, the outpouring of every physical allure—bah! Do you call that happiness?"

"No; it is you who call it happiness," said the girl. "What do you most desire?"

Kent looked at her. He was not a handsome man, but there was strength in his face.

"Your—your trust," he answered, with a break in his voice.

Her eyes did not falter, but a quiet smile came into them.

"You have it, *monsieur*."

"That is the trouble." Kent spoke impulsively, passionately. "I must tell you that I came to you under false pretenses. I lied to your father. I am William Kent, but I am not the English scientist. I am an American, a poor nobody, and I came here to steal!"

He regarded her fixedly. To his astonishment, her face did not change, nor her eyes.

"I guessed that long ago, *monsieur*," she said calmly. "But what does it matter? I know that your heart is good. The world hit you somehow—hit you very hard; and you determined to strike back. Well, what of it? You have not struck."

The spiritual force of the girl's personality stunned Kent, frightened him with its utter serenity, its crystal-clear acuity of vision. He did not realize that if this girl were flung out of her quiet garden into the abrupt turmoil and blunt rapacity of life, she would be helpless and confused before it all. He could see only the spiritual force in her, and it awed him.

He could make no answer to her words, but turned and walked away, his head down. He went to his own room overlooking the garden, and sat for a long while in silence, bitter reflections gnawing at his brain. Chief among these was the conviction that he was a fool.

"Love her? Of course I love her! I never knew love before, and never shall again," he told himself truly enough. "To what end? She would never marry me or love me. If I take the gold, I can't look into her eyes again. Without it, I couldn't ask her to marry me. Oh, the devil! I came here to get the gold. I'll get it!"

That was the stubborn substratum in the man. He could not forget the things he had seen in that city across the river, behind the stone walls and guards that sur-

rounded the shadowy pomp of the princes and mandarins.

He thought again of the six great cabinets in the Can-Chanh room of the palace, of the museum in the Phung-Tien Temple, of the ugly little treasure-house just inside the walls. He thought of the gold tree with living jewels for flowers and leaves, of the great royal seal, the barbaric gems and raw gold. Yet, as he thought of these things, their luster had died for him. The wanderlust was stirring in his heart, the carelessness of money, the impulse to bid all his plans to the devil and to roam elsewhere.

"All because of gray eyes!" he said. "Why should I be double fool enough to hesitate now, after deciding on my course? She'll go out of my life forever. Nothing but manual labor ahead for me! Didn't I sweep the coast cities with a hearth-broom, looking for an opening?"

He fumbled for his pipe and went to the window. He looked out over the garden with hunger in his heart, seeking some stray glimpse of Marie. He saw her, and, with her, Michael Paléologue—a handsome man, lean and long and tanned, a suggestion of the Hellenic in his profile and in his dark curly hair.

Kent's eyes shadowed. That sight of Paléologue smiling into the eyes of Marie maddened him. The fellow could not be an honest man, for he guessed or knew Kent for an impostor, and yet had said nothing.

Turning away, Kent seized his hat and started from the gray stone house. The old Norman housekeeper halted him as he left, and thrust a letter into his hand. He went on without heeding it, his thoughts still upon Paléologue.

He had met Paléologue more than once, here in Hué. Now he knew that he actually hated the man. There was no reason for the vivid, sudden flame in his heart. Paléologue was invariably courteous, gay, debonair; yet Kent could not deny the thing inside of him.

As a matter of fact, Kent was in a period of transition. Ahead he could see only personal disaster. He was stubbornly resolved to have a try at the royal treasure across the river, even though he went to Noumea for it. He cared little about the gold in itself, but he was savage against the world—in the mood which makes weaker men declare that the world owes them a living. Marie Marquet had read him aright.

Kent came out of his bitter day-dream to find himself striding vigorously along the Rue Jules Ferry toward the Than-Thai Bridge, crushing a letter in his hand. He remembered the letter now. Slowing his pace, he came to a halt near the bridge, sought a strip of shade, and lighted his pipe. For a moment he watched the sunlit river, crowded with sampans, dwelling-craft, and traders, and spanned by the bright bridge, where rickshaws swung like butterflies, and where the brilliant palanquin of some mandarin shoved its way through the throngs of Chinese, natives, and French.

Now he looked at the letter. He was still thinking of other things, and so failed to feel any surprise that a letter should have reached him here in Hué, where he was pretending to be another man. It was from Saigon, and was addressed to him. He tore it open, tossed the envelope away, and read the typewritten communication.

For a little while his brain was slow to comprehend that this letter was meant for the William Kent who had been a merchant in Manila. A large export firm in Hanoi and Saigon, handling everything from cement to leather, was about to open a branch in Shanghai. All arrangements had been made with the Chinese authorities. What the firm now needed was a resident manager in Shanghai, preferably an American, to secure the Chinese trade that was desired. The letter went on:

We have been given your name, and have satisfied ourselves, dear *monsieur*, of your integrity, ability, and energy. Therefore we offer you the position with great pleasure and honor to ourselves. The remuneration for the first year will be five thousand American dollars, gold. After the first year, if our relations are mutually satisfactory, we will offer you a five-year contract with bonus terms which should more than double your salary.

"No use!" Kent murmured. "They'd ditch me in a minute after learning that I'd been up here on this fool impersonation stunt; and they'd be sure to learn it. If that isn't the devil's luck! Here's the chance of a lifetime, with one of the big firms—a clear hand up there in Shanghai, opportunity to go the limit without interference, a white man's salary! And I've played the fool."

He shrugged his shoulders, tore the letter into tiny scraps, and threw them away. It was the only answer he could give.

His smoldering eyes fell upon a party of

tourists in tow of a guide. They were coming back from the palace city across the bridge. Nearly all were French; but, striding behind two excited school-teachers, Kent beheld a smooth-shaven, lantern-jawed man, obviously an American, whose face looked vaguely familiar.

The gaze of the two men clashed and held. The tourist turned from his party and came toward Kent, recognition in his eyes. His hand came out.

"Ah, Kent! This is luck, running into you! Heard you were up this way."

Kent shook hands.

"I can't place you," he said frankly, "Yet I know your face."

"Hawkins, of the Zamboanga Trading Company." Hawkins grinned boldly. "I ain't using that name now, y' understand."

Kent understood. He remembered Hawkins now—a man had vanished from Manila with a round sum of money—a thief, a criminal.

"Come along with me and have a drink, eh?" said Hawkins, half defiantly, as if daring Kent to associate with him. "I know where we can get real white man's tippie, Kent."

Kent smiled. Why not? Surely he could not hold himself as any better than this man! What was left to him save to drink, to strike back at the world, to become an outlaw? He passed his arm within that of Hawkins.

"You bet," he said. "Devil take the hindmost!"

That was his mood. It never occurred to him that this meeting was not accidental. That it had been carefully planned.

V

THE day on which William Kent encountered the man Hawkins, you remember, was the same day on which Dr. Marquet was talking with M. Davignan, in the northern city of Hanoi. That same evening Bigarot took the train south to Hué.

On that evening, as it chanced, Marie Marquet finished correcting a bundle of proofs which had to reach the *École Française* in Hanoi with all speed—an article of her father's for the next issue of the *Bulletin*. Kent had not returned to dinner. Marie dined alone with the old Norman housekeeper.

Dinner over, she took the wrapped package of proof-sheets and walked to the Residency, where she left them with an official,

to go north by the night train. As she left the entrance of the building, a white figure followed her; and, outside the gateway, addressed her. This was Michael Paléologue. He had been dining with the resident, he explained, and offered to accompany her home.

The girl hesitated, walked to the corner with him, and paused. She seemed perturbed and uneasy. As they stood thus—Marie's dark-clad shape almost invisible against the green wall, her companion distinct in his whites—a running man turned the corner and uttered an exclamation of relief at sight of Paléologue.

"It is finished!" he said breathlessly. "The boat is filled with gold, but we had to shoot a fool of a guard—ah, you're not alone, Michael?"

From Paléologue broke a low, vivid curse. A swelling sound reached them from the city across the river—a sound of shots, of thudding brazen gongs, a shrill tumult of human voices. It swelled and swelled upon the night air. A cry broke from Marie.

"Fool!" snapped Paléologue. "Take her to the boat—harm her not!"

Another cry—one little cry—that was all. Two minutes later Michael Paléologue was sauntering back into the Residency. He was still there when word came that the royal palace had been plundered, robbed, looted!

By means of stern measures the news was repressed, strenuously denied, kept from the public. The resident himself went across the river to learn what had happened, but he had much difficulty in discovering the facts. He was a busy man that night and all the following morning. He kept the wires to Hanoi hot with messages.

The day was half gone when the train from the north pulled in, and the impatient resident met Bigarot and several other gentlemen. These latter were whisked to the Residency by automobile, and the facts were laid before them.

Bigarot heard everything there was to be said, read the two notes that revealed the identity of the criminal, and said nothing while every one else talked. Then this wooden man, who never spoke unless it was essential, motioned the resident to the adjoining office.

"You wish to speak with me in private?" queried the resident.

Bigarot nodded assent.

They passed into the next office and shut the door. Bigarot sat down. He held in his hand the two notes which had been discovered—one at the residence of Dr. Marquet, the other at the scene of the robbery. The former, written by Marie, told her father that she had gone away to marry William Kent. The latter was a brief scrawl signed with Kent's initials, but without meaning—a memorandum, apparently.

Bigarot laid these two notes under the nose of the resident.

"Forged," he said briefly, producing a snuff-box and inhaling a pinch of snuff.

"How do you know that?" demanded the astonished resident, anger mingling with his surprise.

This man Bigarot had come to the colonies with M. Davignan, and was unknown. His personality was unpleasant. In answer to the question, he merely shrugged.

The resident spoke angrily.

"Speak! Would you have the temerity to say that this M. Kent had nothing to do with the crime?"

Bigarot appeared to reflect, then nodded gravely. The resident swore.

"I am cursed with idiots! I suppose he did not elope with Mlle. Marquet?"

Bigarot shook his head and took another pinch of snuff.

"Devil take you, imbecile! Show some sense, even if you have none. Listen! There were at least four men concerned in the robbery, which took place at exactly seven o'clock. Two guards at the outer palace gate were stabbed silently. The gate was scaled. Two guards at the inner gate were stabbed; that gate also was scaled. Then the gates were opened and the treasure was deliberately carried out to a waiting boat, in sight of all men; and, of course, who would dare to interfere? One of the palace guards came on the scene, realized that something was wrong—and was shot. That caused the first alarm. All we know is that four men, their faces hooded, were seen. They were dressed as natives—two of them as priests of the yellow robe."

"The boat?" asked Bigarot, with his first trace of interest.

"Went down-stream, of course, toward the sea. The robbery took place near the bridge, at the Mirador Gate. To go upstream, the boat must have passed through the midst of the entire city."

"It did," said Bigarot.

"Eh? How do you know that?"

"Because the thieves were not fools."

"Then," said the resident bitingly, "you are prepared to name them, or their chief?"

Bigarot nodded.

"Not M. Kent."

"Why not, then? We know that Mlle. Marquet has disappeared; her note explains this. Kent, too, has disappeared."

"I am not concerned with him," said Bigarot, forced at last to speak freely. "M. Davignan sent me here to prevent this robbery. Since I was too late, I must apprehend the robbers and return the spoil, is it not?"

"Oh, man of excellent virtue!" came the acid retort. "Who, then, is the thief?"

"M. Paléologue."

"*Monsieur le prince*? You have proof?"

"Of course."

"Name it!"

"M. Davignan predicted that he would do it."

"Proof! Name of a devil, do you call that proof?"

"Plenty."

The resident, who had entertained Michael Paléologue lavishly, passed from apoplexy to violent rage, and then to a cold fury. He cursed Bigarot through all the seven hells and back again. Finally he reminded the detective that at the time of the crime Paléologue had been dining with him.

In reply to this, Bigarot only shrugged.

"You dare not arrest him on such a ridiculous suspicion!" cried the distracted resident.

"I don't intend to." Bigarot took another pinch of snuff, and brushed his dirty lapel. "Pray have the kindness to inform the king that his treasure will be returned within forty-eight hours, and the robbers punished. Where is M. Paléologue?"

"Gone on a week's hunting trip into the hills. He left this morning."

Bigarot showed no surprise.

"Alone?"

"With a dozen native hunters and a native guide."

Bigarot blinked behind his thick spectacles and tapped his nose reflectively. A slight change appeared in his face; it was a flame that smoldered in his eyes.

"Kindly furnish me with a guide. I shall follow M. Paléologue."

"Oh! And you would like a file of soldiers, perhaps?"

"Not at all. The three men who came with me—no more."

Once more the resident was threatened with apoplexy. He saw this Bigarot as a low, common fellow who put on the airs of mystery. He saw a distinguished and honored guest threatened with disgrace. He saw disaster after disaster looming, and all because of Bigarot.

He pleaded with the detective. He exhorted, argued, threatened. To all of it, Bigarot listened like a wooden image. At length he rose and spoke, ignoring all that had been said.

"I would like to leave a note for M. Davignan, if you please. He will come tomorrow, by special train. By all means inform the king that his treasure is safe."

"I suppose you know where it is, then?"

"Of course I do."

"In the name of the devil! Where?"

"That information, *monsieur*, is for my master alone."

Bigarot, followed by the infuriated resident, rejoined his three men. They were stolid fellows, blessed with no brains, who would do exactly as they were told and would not stop to think. The resident groaned inwardly.

When he had written and sealed a note to M. Davignan, Bigarot took his four men and departed. He secured the best guide procurable, and before the noon hour was out of the city and in the hills, on the trail of Paléologue.

Meanwhile the disappearance of Marie Marquet had somehow become known. It stirred the French city even more than news of the audacious robbery. Although it was officially and promptly denied—as the robbery had been—there were uneasy rumors afoot. No one knew what to think or to believe.

Meanwhile, also, M. Davignan was speeding south by special train. He beat Bigarot's prediction by a dozen hours, reaching Hué late that night. The robbery was no mere theft of treasure; it threatened the entire French administration. The inviolate palace had been invaded. The sacred treasures of dead generations had been looted.

No sooner had Davignan's train pulled in than the resident rushed him across town to the Comat Palace, to meet with the royal council of mandarins—an infuriated array of gentlemen. On the way the resident talked volubly. Davignan smiled and lis-

tened, read Bigarot's note, and smiled again. Only as he left the automobile did he speak.

"I pray you, leave everything in my hands."

"With pleasure," said the resident whole-heartedly.

No sooner did the yellow mandarins behold the expansive, cherubic countenance of M. Davignan than they were reassured. He smiled upon them, bowed amazingly well, and smiled again. He spoke, and when the translator had echoed his words, the mandarins were appeased. In brief, he promised them the return of the treasure, also the persons of the robbers.

At this last the poor resident went wild. It was no business of the administration to hand white criminals to the royal justice of the Anamese. It was never done, clear against all rules!

"*Monsieur*," said M. Davignan beamingly, "you will agree that when the crown jewels of England are replaced by imitations, as is said to have been done recently, the fact is not advertised? So with us. I shall hand over the criminals. The criminals will be dead. What harm is done?"

"Dead?" repeated the distracted resident. "But Bigarot took no soldiers!"

"He needs none." However, M. Davignan lost his cherubic smile, and thought a space. A sigh oozed slowly from his bosom. "Alas! I fear that I must myself go into the hills, dear *monsieur*! I pray you, find me a litter, bearers, guides, and a dozen soldiers."

"What the devil?" stammered the resident. "And why?"

"Because Bigarot seems to have forgotten how important was the forged evidence against M. Kent. I am afraid that poor Bigarot will get into hot water."

"Then you believe, after all, that this M. Kent is guilty?"

"Not in the least."

The resident made a despairing gesture.

"Well! But into the hills? *Monsieur*, you are not capable of such exertions! You do not know our roads—"

"My dear man!" M. Davignan laughed heartily. "You do not know me. What is ability? The soul, not the body. What is truth?"

"So spoke Pilate," said the resident gloomily; "and he had no answer."

"Pardon! You will find the answer in the Apocrypha." Davignan chuckled.

"We of Provence know our Bible, *monsieur*! I shall leave your charming city at daybreak."

The resident concluded that he was dealing with a madman, and got rid of Davignan as quickly as possible.

VI

OF what transpired in the afternoon that followed his meeting with Hawkins, or that night, or part of the next morning, William Kent had no idea whatever. When he came to himself, he had a vile taste in his mouth and a viler headache. He could remember only two drinks, and he knew that Hawkins had drugged him. Despite these symptoms, his first coherent thought was that he had been transported into some oriental paradise.

In place of the city, in place of the Marquet gardens, he found himself lying upon a green hillside overlooking a primeval jungle. Under him were flagstones. Behind and above him rose a long-abandoned shrine of Kuan-Yin, containing a beautifully veined marble statue of the goddess. The originally harsh colorings of the building of painted wood, tiles, marble, and metal were aged into a blend of magnificent softness.

Staring around as he sat up, Kent found a packet of food and a bottle of native wine at his elbow. He rose and looked over the jungle below. No sign of civilization, not even a village! The mossy, lichenous shrine appeared to be the end of the road—a mere track that came up the hillside. There was no sign of the sea, no trace of the pleasant plain and river of Hué.

"Drugged me, the scoundrel!" said Kent. "Why?"

To this, no answer. His little store of money was intact; nothing of his belongings had been touched. He had received no hurt. The mystery remained insoluble.

Kent explored, and found nothing except a trickling spring of fresh water near the shrine. Of this he drank deeply. Then, having sampled the food, he sat down and lighted his pipe. This singular happening puzzled him, captured his imagination. After a time the drowsy after-effect of the drug returned to him, and he fell asleep.

When he wakened it was to find Michael Paléologue shaking him, and a dozen astonished native hunters standing around, staring. Kent scrambled to his feet. Paléologue surveyed him gaily enough, and

Kent fancied that he detected a glint of mockery in the handsome eyes.

"What the devil?" exclaimed Kent, staring. "Where did you come from?"

"From the city." Paléologue broke into a laugh. "You sleep well in tiger country, my friend! Surely you are not alone?"

Kent stood silent. A likely story, this of his! He could see how the man would laugh at it. Drugged over the drinks, carried somewhere into the hill country, abandoned—and for no reason that he could name! It would sound preposterous.

"Yes," he said at length. "I'm alone—lost my way."

"Oh, that's it!" Paléologue spoke in French now, that the natives might understand. "Lost your way, eh? Well, suppose you keep me company! We're making camp a couple of miles farther on. The afternoon is wearing along pretty well, and you'd better stop with me until morning. I'll send one of these fellows back to the city with you, eh?"

It was frankly said. Kent could have kicked himself for disliking the man.

"That's good of you," he responded. "Where are you bound for? Doesn't the trail end here?"

Paléologue spoke with his guide. The latter grinned and led them past the shrine. Kent found himself proceeding along a hidden trail he had overlooked, which wound along the hillside, occasionally dipping toward the valley below.

A bit shamefaced over his absurd plight, Kent was relieved to be asked no questions. They were only a few miles from the city as a bird flies, but much farther by road. Paléologue pressed Kent to spend a few days with him, seeking tiger. Kent refused.

Later, camp was made in a glade beside a brook. There were no villages near by, it appeared. For a tiger hunt, all this looked singular, but Kent asked no questions.

As for Michael Paléologue, he was vastly contented. He might well be. Everything was working as smoothly as he had dared anticipate. With morning, Kent would return to the city, to tell a most unconvincing tale, and to be nabbed by the police for the robbery. It would be found that he was no British scientist, but an American, a masquerader. After that he would probably spend many years at hard labor in Noumea. Simple, eh?

The unexpected intrusion of Marie Marquet into the game was vexatious, but not

serious. On the spur of the moment Paléologue had ordered his men to take her away unharmed; so her mouth was shut temporarily. She was now half a mile farther up the hill road, at a ruined temple, with Hawkins and two of the three Frenchmen who had actually carried out the robbery in accordance with the careful plan of Michael Paléologue. The third Frenchman was in one of the lower villages on the back trail, to bring notice of any chance danger.

No danger was expected, however. Paléologue had planned carefully, confident that he himself would be above any suspicion, for his alibi was perfect. As soon as he had a quiet interview with Marie Marquet, which would be within a few moments, he would assure himself of her silence. Knowing her, he was quite content to trust her word in the matter.

Then he would accompany her back to the city, with some specious story to account for her absence. She could declare that Kent had forged the note about eloping with her—she could be left to suppose that Kent had really forged it. A neat stroke, there! Paléologue could meet his four men, who would also return to the city, and the loot could be divided without delay or danger. An excellent plan! Thus, all things considered, Paléologue was hugely satisfied with himself.

Kent, who knew of nothing amiss at Hué, naturally had no suspicions. His own strange situation, and the mystery of Hawkins's motive in drugging him and leaving him here in the hills, kept his thoughts in a hopeless tangle.

The two men dined on provisions brought from town by Paléologue's men. Darkness was crowding in close upon the little camp; the natives squatted about the fire and watched the two white men before the door of the shelter tent. After dinner Kent refused the proffered cigarets and lighted his pipe. The meal had done him worlds of good.

"I suppose," he said, eying his host with a smile, "you've given up all thought of lifting the royal treasure? It looks different here from what it did in Singapore."

"Not a bit of it!" Paléologue twirled his blond mustache. "I'll do it yet—unless you get ahead of me. I had an idea that was really why you came up here."

Kent nodded, careless what the man thought or knew. "Yes. I might have a try at it."

"All luck to you! First come, first served." Paléologue rose with his gay laugh. "Do you care for a stroll? The moon will be up shortly."

Kent glanced at the darkness and shook his head.

"A stroll, in this wilderness? No, thanks!"

Paléologue stooped over to pick up his forgotten cigaret-case, then turned for a word with the guide. As he stooped, a thin object fell from his coat. He did not observe it.

Kent leaned forward, picked up the thing, and was about to call Paléologue back—when he checked the words on his lips. He stared amazedly, incredulously, at the object in his hand. When he glanced up again, Paléologue was strolling from the circle of light.

The object in Kent's hand was a little thin necklace of old silver, not at all valuable. Kent recognized it instantly. It was the only jewel that Marie Marquet ever wore; it had belonged to her mother. How, then, came it to be in the possession of Michael Paléologue?

The touch of the silver chain brought a sense of the girl's nearness to Kent, startling him. Swift upon this, the realization that Paléologue had kept the trinket in his own pocket, smirching it with his personality, drove into Kent's brain and brought him to his feet. Thrusting the silver chain into his pocket, he strode across the circle of firelight and struck up the trail by which Paléologue had vanished. The natives stared after him, incurious.

"She never gave it to him!" thought the American, angered deep in his soul. "He found it or stole it—and he shall account for it!"

The starlight opened up the trail before him. He had not gone fifty yards from camp before the sound of voices brought him to an astonished halt. He paused; the voices came from ahead. He caught the low laugh of Paléologue. He strode on, but cautiously. Whom had the man encountered in this solitude?

Monsieur le prince, meanwhile, was enjoying with huge amusement the story of how Kent had been drugged and brought here. Hawkins was the narrator. Hawkins had been waiting at the edge of the camp for Paléologue to join him.

"This poor dunce of an American! It is almost a pity to make him—what do you

say?—the goat!" Paléologue laughed again as the tale was finished. "However, it goes well. The lady is safe, unharmed?"

"Quite," said Hawkins. "It was touch and go, I can tell you, gettin' her away at the last minute! But we did it. Once she realized we meant to treat her as a lady, she was all right—not a bit of fuss, barring a few tears."

"Tears will dry," said Paléologue. "I shall go on to the temple with you, and interview her. It is remarkable, my Hawkins, how magnificently we are pulling this affair through! No one hurt except the palace guards. No damage done to anybody. M. Kent will be the only one to suffer, and fools must pay for their folly in any case. The treasure is put into circulation, instead of being hoarded behind stone walls—and we are rich for life!"

"You're some bird, I'll say!" returned Hawkins admiringly.

It was at this instant that Kent came within hearing distance, and paused to listen. Thus he failed to catch the mention of Marie Marquet.

"The treasure—you followed my orders?" asked Paléologue.

"You bet!" was the fervent response. "Dubois and Farvel took the boat, while Franchipot and I were getting rid of the yellow robes in the cabin. She's where you ordered, with rice-mats over the stuff. Lord, if we'd only had time to gut the whole place!"

"Franchipot is in that last village?"

"Sure. He'll keep an eye open for the news. Said he might be along to-night. Well, you ready to hike along with me? The boys will sure be glad to see you. Dubois has been hitting up the dope, and Farvel is nervous as the devil, waiting for news."

Paléologue nodded.

Kent, listening to this dialog, stood paralyzed as comprehension slowly crept into his brain. It staggered him. He could not realize Paléologue's full schemes with regard to himself, of course, but he understood a good deal. After tiger? The man had lied abominably! He had probably expected to find Kent—why, the American could not guess, but he felt sure that Paléologue had been behind his drugging and kidnapping.

And—the royal treasure looted! Much must have happened in the city on the preceding night. Hawkins was concerned in

it, and three Frenchmen, obviously. Well, what then? What about this thin silver necklace in his hand? Kent could find no light here. For the moment the importance of this paled before the greater fact—the royal treasure had been looted.

Suddenly Kent saw that the whole game lay in his hands at this moment.

He could let Paléologue return, catch him off his guard, and down him. With the native hunters he could go on, capture Hawkins and his two companions, and round up the entire gang. If he found no treasure, he could bargain with Paléologue; a good half of it would come to him, surely. Riches for life, at no cost, at small exertion! Thief from the thieves—why not?

For a full moment Kent stood trembling under the impact of the temptation. He thrust his hand into a pocket, seeking some weapon. His fingers touched the silver necklace.

Marie! He thought of her now, standing before him, those gray eyes upon him; and the fever cooled in his blood.

Did he want the treasure, after all? Was gold worth what he would lose? Was it not better to go out empty-handed, to go back into the world, with the knowledge that he could at any time return and look into her eyes again? If he took the gold, he could not do this.

* Sweat stood out on his brow. He must decide hurriedly, hurriedly! Gold, or the gray eyes of a girl—which?

Marie could never marry him. He could never ask her, unless his prospects were changed by some miracle. Was this worth that—was that worth this? Gold or gray eyes! The hard thoughts whirled in his brain like the wings of birds.

Thin silver links in his fingers—the touch of them cooled him again. He brushed one hand across his wet brow. Abruptly he straightened up, turned, jerked about by the sound of thudding boots coming from behind. He knew in a flash who was coming—Franchipot, the man from the village below.

Kent laughed and swung into the path. He had decided.

VII

KENT's decision was swiftly made. He had only the remarks of Paléologue and Hawkins to go upon; yet these showed him the situation clearly enough. The thudding of boots on the trail betokened a Euro-

pean—ergo, the man Franchipot was coming to rejoin his comrades.

Barely had the thought formed in his brain when he acted. Barely had Kent swung into the trail when the unsuspecting scoundrel was upon him.

Being unarmed, Kent used his fist. He lunged out of the shadows and struck home to the pit of the stomach. The runner emitted one startled gasp and collapsed in a quivering heap.

Kent stooped above him. From the man's body he took two automatic pistols, then turned and followed in the way Paléologue had gone.

"One down!" he thought grimly. "I might run for it and fetch the police, but Heaven only knows where they are! Guess I'll go after the gang and take 'em in, or at least reconnoiter a bit. If the job looks too stiff, I can find my way back to town. If Paléologue really stripped the palace, this section of the country will sure be buzzing like a hornets' nest!"

What really tugged at him was the thought of Hawkins. He wanted to see that gentleman again immediately. He did not think that the defaulter would get any joy of the meeting. His main objective was Hawkins; the prince seemed comparatively unimportant.

The dazzling audacity of four or five men actually carrying off such a stroke appealed to Kent mightily. Had it not been for his personal affair with Hawkins, had it not been for the slender chain of silver in his pocket, he might have determined otherwise; as it was, he had resolved to go straight. The tempting lure of the treasure was cast out of his mind forever. He had chosen gray eyes as against raw gold, and now he found himself supremely happy in his choice.

He followed the path with caution. He did not know where he was going or what he would find, but he went forward.

The way seemed interminable. His progress was slow, because of the darkness and the jungle walls on either hand. When at length he perceived the glinting sheen of firelight ahead, he felt as if he had passed hours on the way; in reality, it was not half an hour from the time he had left camp on the trail of Paléologue.

Meantime, the Prince of Achaia was briefly speaking with his men about their camp-fire. As he stood there, this man who bore such bizarre titles, this man, who

represented such historic names, this man who claimed to trace his ancestry back to the last rulers of the Eastern Empire—all the handsome virility of the man became suddenly sinister, cruel, ruthless.

He was no longer the prince, the cultured gentleman; he was now the criminal. Before him sat one of the two rascally Frenchmen, Dubois, a bamboo opium-pipe across his knees. Farvel stood beside Hawkins, watching, scowling, and half fearful.

"Species of architect!" snapped Paléologue, a vicious lash in his voice as he gazed at the opium-smoker. "Pig that you are—away with the pipe!" As he spoke, he kicked the bamboo into the fire. "Up!"

The ruffian scrambled to his feet. Paléologue's sinister stare frightened him, and he mumbled something inarticulate.

Behind the firelight gaped the yawning doorway of some long-desolate stone temple, overgrown by the jungle, ruined, yet still preserving a room or two of its ancient chambers. The other three sides were jungle-walled. This was the end of the trail.

Paléologue turned from Dubois and addressed Hawkins.

"Where is she?"

Hawkins jerked his thumb toward the doorway. Paléologue nodded, then gave his orders.

"Leave us. Go back to my camp, and make sure that fool Kent suspects nothing. Look out for Farchipot, and don't let him meet Kent."

A nod of assent. The three men filed out of the firelight and vanished along the trail.

Paléologue remained alone beside the fire. Kicking aside Dubois's tiny lamp and opium outfit, he took a cigaret from his case and lighted it. His features smoothed out. A smile on his lips, he twirled his mustache and advanced to the doorway. He was once more the debonair prince, the graceful gentleman.

"*Mademoiselle!*" he said. "Have I your permission to enter?"

The answer was a half-choked sound that might have been a gasp; then the voice of Marie.

"You—at last! Brute that you are, I have learned everything!"

Paléologue chuckled. He scratched a match and held it up to illumine the interior of the chamber. He stepped forward into the ruin and bowed. The match flickered down.

"So you know everything, dear *mademoiselle?*" he asked tentatively.

"Everything!" Her response was passionate, touched with hysteria. "You planned to rob the royal palace—your men accomplished it!"

"Well, that is quite satisfactory," said Paléologue gaily. "When that foolish Dubois ran upon us and blurted out his words, I had to assure myself of your silence. I regret what inconvenience has been caused you. It was necessary, you understand. I have now come to escort you back to the city, conditional upon your promise of silence."

The steel in his voice, the assured confidence of his manner, the impervious aloofness of him, must have frightened the girl. Had he been gallant, she might have defied him; but instead of being gallant, he was infinitely worse—he quite ignored her sex. It became evident that to him she was a vexatious incident, and nothing more.

"I will tell them everything!"

Marie was sobbing as she spoke. Paléologue sighed, with the air of one who faces a dreaded duty.

"Pardon, *mademoiselle!* You will do nothing of the kind, because you will promise me not to do so, and I think you keep your promises. Let us consider. If you do not promise, all the world will know that you have run away with me, you comprehend. I shall be forced to send you elsewhere with these men of mine. Unfortunately, I cannot marry you, as I have a wife living somewhere in Europe. Besides, my thoughts are of gold, not of women. I never mix such things, *mademoiselle.* On the other hand, you give one simple little promise, and before morning you will be back in Hué, unharmed. Oh, by the way, a trinket fell from your neck at the moment of our forced parting—due to the unavoidable confusion of the affair, doubtless. I saved it for you."

Paléologue began to search his pockets. An exclamation broke from him. He stepped back to the light of the doorway; then, suddenly, he whirled about.

"Don't bother," said Kent, stepping into the doorway. "Hands up, please! I have the necklace safe. Up with them, you fool!"

Paléologue's hands went up. Not a word came from him; he stood petrified, staring at Kent. His figure, with upraised arms, was dimly illumined against the black back-

ground. Kent moved slightly, that the fire-light from behind him might reach Paléologue more clearly.

A great cry of gladness, of delight, burst from Marie Marquet when she recognized Kent's voice. She started forward to the doorway.

"M. Kent, is it really you?" she said.

"Yes. I've come for you," replied Kent grimly, not taking his eyes from the none too distinct figure of Paléologue. "This man fooled me nicely; but your little silver chain dropped from his pocket, and I knew there was something wrong. By gad, Paléologue, I never dreamed it was as bad as this!"

His voice bit.

Here, abruptly, the unexpected intervened. Marie Marquet, stepping forward, seized the hand that Kent extended to her—his left. She caught at it convulsively. Her figure joined his in the doorway, cutting off the firelight.

Like a shadow, Paléologue threw himself into the blackness beyond.

Kent fired. The flash gave him a glimpse of the man drawing a weapon. He threw himself to one side; the dragging weight of the girl, who screamed at the shot, forced him to remain inside the entrance. His arm about Marie, he came to his knees, pressing her close down, expecting an instant return shot.

To his surprise, there came, instead, the cool laugh of Paléologue from the darkness.

"Thanks for the shot, Kent; saves me the trouble. Don't worry—I'll not shoot until you try to leave. I don't want innocent blood on my hands, you see!"

Kent made no response. He was forced to believe the man's words—Paléologue would not shoot for fear of hitting the girl. He could feel her trembling figure within his arm, and he patted her shoulder reassuringly. Then he came to his feet.

At the sound, Paléologue fired twice, deliberately. The damnable cunning of the man, his merciless cruelty, maddened Kent with sheer horror. He perceived that there was no hope for him, no pity. One of the two bullets caught his left arm, jerking him sharply around.

He broke free from Marie and plunged forward into the blackness, firing wildly with the revolver in his right hand. Everything was swept from him save the mad lust for Paléologue's throat. The stone chamber became an inferno of flying lead,

choking fumes, spitting weapons. Stabs of flame here and there, both men firing at random.

New voices suddenly burst in upon them. Kent found himself caught about the neck from behind, shouts dinning in his ears. The pistol was torn from his hand. His second weapon went crashing to the stone flooring.

He struck out madly, but a violent kick in the side paralyzed him momentarily. Men were crowding atop of him, suffocating him, beating him down and down. He lost balance and fell, heard the hoarse tones of Hawkins at his ear, and landed one crashing blow that evoked a scream. Then they had him.

The medley of oaths, shouts, and frenzied cries died down. Some one brought brands from the fire. Matches were struck. Kent lay senseless, and they bound him swiftly; his wounds were slight. Hawkins staggered outside, moaning horribly and clasping a broken nose with fingers that shrank from the touch. Marie Marquet, unhurt, lay in a faint.

"Ah, Franchipot!" Paléologue surveyed the three Frenchmen. "You came in good time!"

Franchipot, a burly rogue, rubbed his stomach reflectively and grinned.

"Somebody hit me as I came, or I would have been here sooner," he rejoined. "It was this madman, no doubt. No time to lose! Four of the police are behind me, but they are not making good time. They halted at the village for something to eat, and to inquire for news of you. They follow you!"

"Follow me?" Paléologue started. "Impossible! There can be no suspicion of me."

"I heard them talking," panted the other quickly. "There is no mistake. They made mention of you. They asked questions in the village, and evidently intended to come after you at once."

Paléologue motioned the men outside. He stood for a moment, irresolute. This news had absolutely staggered him, for he had conceived himself above all suspicion.

He stood fingering a red wale across his scalp where one of Kent's bullets had scraped. Then, assuming a coolness which he did not feel, he took out a cigaret, lighted it, and smiled at his four men. His attitude impressed them, as it was meant to do.

"Hawkins, remain here on guard. Harm neither of the prisoners, remember! If you hear shots, do not be alarmed. You others, come with me. Four police, Franchipot?"

"Four, and a native guide—no more. They are men from Hanoi."

"Very well! Dubois, have you that little vial of clear liquid?"

Dubois handed over a little leather case. Franchipot looked at Farvel; a touch of horror lay in that one look they exchanged. Paléologue caught the look, laughed scornfully, and eyed the three.

"Stay here," he ordered, contempt in his voice. "I'll handle this myself, alone. Stay here, and await my return. It will be at daybreak, or soon afterward. Take good care of the two in the room yonder!"

He turned away and sauntered out of the firelight. The three Frenchmen looked at one another. Dubois, sullen fear in his eyes, made the sign of the cross and turned away. Farvel bent over the moaning, cursing Hawkins with rough kindness. Franchipot lit a cheroot.

VIII

PALÉOLOGUE sat beside his camp-fire and smoked while he awaited the police. His natives were gone. A hint that police were coming had sent them into the brush like startled birds.

"Decidedly I am unfortunate!" mused Paléologue. "Except for that little meeting with Marie Marquet at the gate of the Residency, everything would have gone off without a hitch. Who could have foreseen that? To stop her mouth, I had to carry her off. That difficulty was overcome. Kent was here, fooled, tricked, ready to go back to town. Then the silver necklace must drop from my pocket—the cursed girl again! She blocks me at every step. Not of her own volition, either; she's a weak, silly little baggage, but each time I accomplish the impossible I am blocked by her! Almost I am tempted to believe in some providence! Well, I still hold the winning cards. What devilish luck brought these Hanoi men to Hué in time to trail me? And why the devil did they trail me?"

He shrugged his shoulders and set to work filling his silver cigaret-case with a number of cigarets which lay in his lap. He inspected each one critically in the firelight before tucking it into the case. He had donned his sun helmet, which quite concealed the red wale across his scalp, al-

though the wearing of it must have caused him intense pain.

When the police came, following their native guide, Paléologue received them cordially.

They were office men, these four, unused to hill trails and jungle byways. Two of them were limping bravely; the third was shaking with ague. Bigarot alone was as usual—droop-shouldered, spectacled, silent, a little flame in his eyes. He pushed the guide aside and disdained the outstretched hand of Paléologue.

"You are M. Michael Paléologue?" he said in his dry voice.

"I am." Paléologue dropped his hand, assumed an air of hauteur. "And you, *messieurs*?"

"We are special agents of the police commissariat," said Bigarot. "We have come to request that you should return to Hué with us, to answer certain questions with regard to the robbery of the royal palace."

Paléologue drew himself up.

"What mean you?" he demanded. "Is it to say that I, the Prince of Achaia, am accused of any crime?"

"By no means," said Bigarot, although the flame deepened in his eyes. To this man the title of a prince was as the red cloak of the matador to the bull. "It is a matter of evidence which his excellency the resident thought you might be able to give. That is all."

Paléologue looked at the four, then shrugged and flung off his grand manner. With a whimsical grimace he waved his hand at the deserted camp.

"Good! I welcome you, and am glad to see you. What think you? These devils of natives deserted me—ran away! If I can help his excellency, I shall be very glad indeed. Sit down, *messieurs*; we cannot possibly start before morning, I suppose?"

Bigarot hesitated. A glance at his three men showed that they could go no farther without rest.

"Thank you, *monsieur*," he answered. "We accept your hospitality."

Paléologue was not deceived. He saw that behind the words of Bigarot was an implacable determination. For some reason this man suspected him. The other three were of no great moment, but they were sufficient to back up Bigarot with force.

Wine and food were on the folding table

by the fire. Paléologue played the host admirably, seated himself, and began to chat about the robbery. He showed no reserve in speaking of it. Had he not been dining at the Residency at the very time of the crime?

One of the three men produced some vile cigarets. Paléologue protested quickly.

"Good tobacco, *messieurs*, is my fancy; poor stuff offends my nostrils," he said, laughing. He opened his cigaret-case and laid it on the table. "At your service, my friends!"

Each of the three men helped himself to a cigaret. Paléologue handed the case to Bigarot.

"I do not smoke," said the latter.

"So much the better for you!" said Paléologue coolly.

He himself took a cigaret, but he held it in his fingers unlighted.

Turning to the native guide, and handing him a piece of money, Paléologue asked him to go to the village and hire a few men to carry his effects back to the city. This request was reasonable, and Bigarot nodded. The native rose and disappeared. The five white men were alone.

Paléologue passed into a discussion of his unfortunate tiger-hunt, now doomed to failure. Presently he took from the tent a gun-case, and displayed a very handsome rifle. He sat with it across his knees, talking cheerfully the while.

Suddenly one of the three men rose unsteadily to his feet. It was the one with ague.

"I have something—something wrong in the head!" he said, staggering a little. "I am ill. M. Bigarot, I shall rest for a few moments, with your permission."

"Do so," said Bigarot, who meanwhile had spoken no word.

Paléologue calmly took a cartridge from the rifle, examined it, and replaced it in the breech. When he laid the gun across his knees once more, the muzzle pointed at Bigarot.

"Decidedly," said one of the other two men, "this is a strange cigaret, M. Paléologue! The taste of it is queer."

Paléologue cocked the rifle and leaned back, his finger on the trigger, his eyes on those of Bigarot. The detective stiffened with a horrified comprehension.

The man who had just spoken uttered a groan and rose; he staggered toward the nearest clump of trees. The third man,

who had not spoken, had quietly relaxed in his chair and lay there, supine, his eyes closed.

"Your tobacco," said Bigarot, "is singular, *monsieur*."

"It is specially prepared." Paléologue smiled. "Would you prefer a cigaret, or shall my rifle explode accidentally?"

A mortal pallor overspread the countenance of Bigarot; yet his voice was firm.

"I have an aversion to cigarets," he returned. "It seems to me that I have heard of these particular ones, *monsieur le prince*. Were they not used last year in Java? I remember reports of the case."

Paléologue regarded the man attentively.

"Your nerve is admirable, my man," he said. "Perhaps you would like to meet M. Dubois, who invented those cigarets—or, rather, the impregnation? He is an excellent chemist, who has been unfortunately ruined by opium. Since we are alone, let us depart. Stand up!"

At these ominous words, "since we are alone," the unfortunate Bigarot threw a glance at his companions. He saw that where there had been five men, only two now remained alive. He staggered to his feet, and, at Paléologue's command, turned his back.

Paléologue put the muzzle of his rifle at Bigarot's back, and searched him. Handcuffs clicked on the detective's wrists. At the order of his captor, Bigarot stumbled forth into the trail.

The moon had now risen, cleaving the darkness with silver radiance. Paléologue had not anticipated rejoining his men so soon, but he desired to be gone from his camp before the native guide returned with men from the village. He had certain arrangements to make.

Upon reaching the ruined temple, he found his men sleeping, save Hawkins, who was on guard. They were up and rebuilding the fire instantly. As the flames flickered, they crowded about Paléologue and his prisoner.

"Ah!" exclaimed the burly Franchipot. "Congratulations, M. Paléologue! You know this rogue, this vagabond, this *cochon sale*?"

"How should I know him?" said Paléologue disdainfully. "Who is he, then?"

"The familiar spirit of M. Davignan."

"Ah!" The word broke from Dubois, who leaned forward and tweaked the nose of the unhappy captive. "*Nom d'un*

clysopompe! It is Bigarot — Bigarot the terrible, Bigarot who hates all aristocrats, Bigarot the little dog of the fat man! Ho, Bigarot! I will teach you with what wood I warm myself, me!"

"Be quiet," commanded Paléologue, and addressed the captive. "What brought you from Hanoi?"

"M. Davignan believed that you were about to commit a crime," answered Bigarot helplessly. He looked very pitiful and weak, this little man with the drooping shoulders, with his spectacles awry on his nose. "When I reached Hué, the crime had been committed; therefore I followed you."

"Oh!" Paléologue twisted his mustache. "There was no evidence?"

Bigarot merely shook his head. The looks of hatred, the muttered oaths around him, seemed to crush him down. One would have expected him to break into a snuffle at any moment.

"Well, my friends, our task is ended; there is no more haste," said Paléologue, with a wave of his hand. "Tie this gentleman to a tree, and rejoin me."

Bigarot was dragged away, none too gently, and was bound fast to a near-by tree. The four then rejoined Paléologue at the fire. Hawkins began to groan for a surgeon to attend his broken nose.

"You shall have one to-morrow," said Paléologue. "Meanwhile, take some opium and sleep. We shall all of us sleep until daybreak. Then you, Dubois, shall take this Bigarot off into the jungle and put a bullet into him. Make your way back to the city and rejoin us there. You, Franchipot, will come with me; we take M. Kent back to answer for his crimes. You, Farvel, will return to the city with Hawkins, by yourselves."

"And the lady?" queried Franchipot, with a leer.

"Is my affair. What becomes of her will depend upon herself."

"The natives? The guide of this Bigarot?" spoke up Farvel.

Paléologue merely smiled and waved his hand.

Peace settled upon the ruins of the old temple. The men took turns standing watch. From his tree, Bigarot blinked like some owlish gargoyle. The others slept about the fire.

With the first streaks of flame in the eastern sky, Paléologue was up, rousing his

men. Wood was gathered, the fire was built up, the last of their provisions were brought forth. Bearing bread and cheese and wine, Paléologue advanced to the temple doorway.

"You are awake, *mademoiselle*?" he said. "I bring breakfast. The end of your pilgrimage is now at hand, I trust. Ah, Kent! *Bon jour!*"

He entered. Kent, bound and stiff, looked at him without response. Marie Marquet came to her feet, traces of tears upon her cheeks. She was trembling with the morning cold. In the obscurity of the stone chamber she looked like some pallid ghost of aforetime.

Setting down his burdens, Paléologue opened a pocket knife and cut Kent's bonds.

"Now," he said quietly, "let us have a little talk, we three. I should have regretted it very much had you two children perished last night; but the extremity was desperate, M. Kent. At present, I am happy to say, all goes well. It is not necessary that I should kill you."

"Beast!" said the girl, her voice low.

"If you so decree," said Paléologue coldly. "In five minutes I shall return. I desire both of you to promise that you will say nothing, to anybody, on any pretext, of anything that has passed. If you refuse, I shall be compelled to kill you both. If you assent, you shall go back to Hué with me at once."

"How can we believe you?" said the girl.

"Because I ask your promise. Otherwise, would I bother?"

Paléologue bowed and left them.

Marie stooped above Kent; helping him chafe his numbed wrists into life. Her tears dropped on his cheek. Kent lifted one of her hands to his lips; the cold fingers clenched suddenly upon his.

"What can we do?" said the girl, her tone hopeless. "If I thought he would spare us—"

Kent knew nothing of the trap that had been laid for him in Hué. He believed that Paléologue would murder him; but he also believed that the man would not hurt Marie unless forced to it.

"Promise him," he answered. "It is our only hope."

Marie accepted the advice. Five minutes afterward, Paléologue had his promise. Dubois had already departed by a side trail

that wound down the hillside, driving before him the manacled Bigarot.

IX

As the first sunlight of the new day flooded the green world, Farvel and Hawkins departed by the same trail that Dubois and Bigarot had followed, but more leisurely. Franchipot remained with Paléologue, who spoke one last word with Kent.

"Your word of honor, M. Kent?"

"I have given it," said Kent quietly, supporting Marie on his arm. "If you wish to shoot me in the back, then—"

"Don't be a fool," said Paléologue in English. "Precede us, if you please."

Kent and Marie started away from the ruins. At this instant the sound of a single shot came lifting from the green depths of the jungle. Paléologue and Franchipot exchanged a significant look. That shot, of course, signified that the unfortunate Bigarot was no more.

The four passed along the jungle trail. Marie Marquet, in the fresh morning light, was more than ever like a frail flower; yet Kent found her cool enough now that the crisis seemed over, and quite self-reliant. Once, as a gay bird leaped out ahead of them, he caught a swift glow of radiance in her eyes.

"The way out—the way home!" he thought, not without a pang. "That's everything to her. She'll come through it all right; but why was Paléologue so easy with me?"

This question troubled him. A glance over his shoulder showed him the two men following unconcernedly, carelessly. He did not believe that Paléologue would for a moment trust to his promise of silence. What, therefore, lay behind the man's indifference? What plot, what bloody gin, what pitfall?

Kent was thinking thus when the air vibrated twice. The two shots came from a distance, and were felt rather than heard—dull thuds, as if the shooting were done below some muffling depth of jungle.

"Some hunter, probably," said Paléologue to his companion. "That reminds me—get rid of your pistol at once, *mon ami*. Such a weapon might be incriminating, and we have no further need of it. We shall assuredly be searched, so get rid of the thing now."

As he spoke, Paléologue drew out his own automatic and tossed it into the trees.

Franchipot followed suit. They sauntered on after Kent and Marie, who had not observed the action.

It was perhaps five minutes later that Franchipot came to a sudden halt, his features blanching. He caught at Paléologue's arm.

"Listen! Voices—at your camp!"

"Quiet!" Paléologue gripped him with iron fingers. "Not a word—let me talk! Come!"

They hurried forward and joined Kent and Marie Marquet. All four came at once into sight of Paléologue's camp, and halted in astonishment.

This place, which should have been deserted, was alive with natives. A palanquin stood near the tent. Soldiers under a French officer were busy, and at Paléologue's folding table sat the bulky, white-clad figure of M. Davignan.

With an excited buzz, the four arrivals were surrounded. Kent felt dazed as he beheld Davignan bowing over Marie's hand and clasping his own fingers in a warm grip. Then the fat man, beaming, extended his hand to Paléologue.

"Ah, *monsieur le prince*! Welcome, every one! You have breakfasted?"

Paléologue looked dumfounded at this greeting, as well he might. A cry broke from Marie. There was a moment of excited questions, of rapid words; then Davignan led the girl to the stool he had just vacated.

The soldiers had closed around the three men. Kent stood in rather puzzled wonder, amazed by the sight of Davignan. Franchipot affected a huge unconcern, which was belied by the furtive glances he darted around. Paléologue wore his best air of cold hauteur; he sensed a crisis, and he met it superbly.

Leaving Marie, Davignan now returned to the group, beaming cherubically. He was about to speak when Paléologue forestalled him.

"M. Davignan, may I have an instant of private speech with you?"

"But certainly!" exclaimed Davignan. "I am at your service. You will excuse us, *messieurs*?" he added, to the others. "One little moment!"

Paléologue stepped forward. Davignan took his arm familiarly.

"This is admirable, this meeting!" said the commissioner. "Mlle. Marquet was missed, M. Kent was missed—and I find

them in your company! Decidedly, *mon-sieur le prince*, you have done us a great favor."

Reassured, Paléologue halted.

"Listen, M. Davignan. You found certain dead men here?"

Davignan frowned.

"Ah, my poor men! They lie in the tent yonder."

"I have brought you the criminal. Before I left the city, naturally, I had learned that M. Kent was suspected of the palace robbery. Last night I was camped here. I had trouble with my natives; they quit me in a flash. I was alone. Suddenly four white men appeared, with a native guide. They were your four agents. I welcomed them, and the guide returned to the nearest village to bring me men and bearers. You comprehend?"

"Perfectly." Davignan fingered his imperial thoughtfully. "And then?"

Paléologue removed his helmet and showed the furrow across his scalp.

"I do not know. I heard a shot, felt the bullet strike me here. It was an ambuscade. When I recovered, this American, M. Kent, was with me; also Mlle. Marquet. Three of your men lay dead; the fourth had vanished."

"Ah!" exclaimed Davignan. "*Saperlipopette!* And then?"

"M. Kent informed me that he had left the city with the lady, in order to be married. They took a sampan up the river, intending to go to the mission station at Bhuloc—or so he said. He told a most unconvincing story of having lost his way. Naturally, I said nothing. I knew that his gang of robbers had fallen upon us. I pretended to believe all he said, and resolved to overpower him if possible. The headquarters of his gang lay in a ruined temple, a little farther along this trail. I saw that the lady was unhappy—"

Davignan pressed the arm of the prince. Sympathy and a hearty reassurance were in his cherubic features as he spoke.

"*Mon ami*, say no more! Me, I have imagination. I can understand. You acted well, nobly! *Saperlipopette!* The man suspects nothing?"

"Nothing," said Paléologue. "He does not dream that his connection with the robbery is known. Further, he is an American, and not the Englishman William Kent at all. I suspected this when we met him at Singapore—you remember?"

"Yes, that is true." Davignan nodded pompously, and motioned toward Franchipot. "And this fellow?"

"My servant, an honest *garçon*. I had left him at the village below. He rejoined us this morning. Kent's gang had disappeared, so he was unmolested."

Davignan nodded.

"You have done wonders, *monsieur!*" he said earnestly. "I congratulate you! And to think that I, Davignan, did you the injustice to suspect you of having designs upon that treasure!"

"*Monsieur!*" exclaimed Paléologue, haughtily indignant.

Davignan patted his arm.

"Apologies by the thousand! Hold—let me arrange my thoughts an instant."

Holding Paléologue by the arm, Davignan stared over the shoulder of the prince, his lips moving silently, a frown of reflection overspreading his cherubic visage. His eyes, however, were fastened upon a certain point of the brush and jungle growth enclosing the little glade.

In this growth a face had appeared. The eyes of Davignan were fastened upon this face, which was that of Bigarot.

Davignan made a slight gesture with his free hand. The face vanished.

"Ah!" exclaimed the fat commissioner. "I have it! Let us send Mlle. Marquet to the city in my palanquin, yes? Let us not do her the painful harm of inflicting questions. Does she love this impostor of an American?"

Paléologue twirled his mustache and smiled.

"*Monsieur*, I believe that she does. From some words which we exchanged this morning, I am convinced of it."

"Good! Then leave matters to me."

M. Davignan approached Marie Marquet and bowed. He inquired whether she desired to be sent at once to her home. She looked at him and smiled faintly.

"If you please. My father has not returned yet from Hanoi?"

"No."

"M. Kent—he will also proceed to the city?"

"When I have asked him a few questions"—Davignan waved his hand—"he will return with me, *mademoiselle*."

She assented. Davignan called his bearers, offered his arm. The girl's eyes sought Kent, who approached. She extended her hand.

"I am returning to town. I shall expect you soon, *monsieur*. *Au revoir!*"

Kent smiled. He was a trifle uneasy over Paléologue's private conversation with Davignan, but he felt that he was now a bystander, without further interest in the affair of the royal treasure. He was curious to see how Paléologue intended to act. That he would have an accounting with the man, later, he had long since resolved.

In five minutes the palanquin was ready. Paléologue bowed coldly, and Marie ignored him. With an escort of four men and a native corporal, the palanquin was borne away.

Davignan said a low word to the French lieutenant. The latter addressed his soldiers in Anamese. In a twinkling the three white men were surrounded, and deft hands searched them. Then they were released. No weapons had been found.

"*Diantre!*" cried Paléologue angrily. "This is an outrage, *monsieur!*"

Davignan laughed heartily.

"Come, come, *monsieur le prince!* I am taking no chances, you comprehend, with desperate men. M. Kent, what do you know about the robbery which took place in the royal palace of Hué? Have you any knowledge on the subject?"

Kent met the laughing, probing black eyes. For an instant his lips compressed; then he spoke.

"Yes," he said. "I have some knowledge of it, *monsieur*, but I have passed my word of honor to keep silence."

Paléologue's brows lifted slightly. Franchipot gazed admiringly at the speaker. Neither man had expected Kent to keep his word. Davignan merely shrugged, and turned to Paléologue.

"May I have the privilege of introducing a friend, *monsieur le prince*—a friend who is very anxious to meet you? True, the occasion lacks ceremony, yet—"

"I should be delighted," said Paléologue, a questioning wonder in his gaze.

Davignan made a gesture. From the bushes came Bigarot, a pistol in his hand, his smoldering eyes fastened upon Paléologue. His wrists were still manacled.

The latter turned deathly pale. Franchipot opened his mouth and stared with fallen jaw at this man who had come from the dead. Bigarot emitted a dry laugh.

"So, aristocrat! I struck down Dubois by a *coup de savate*; I shot him. Then I shot Hawkins and Farvel. One cannot

take chances with both hands fastened together, you understand! So now I am here to pull you down, dog of an aristocrat!"

"You will make your verbal report to me, now," commanded Davignan.

He motioned the lieutenant, and the soldiers closed in about Franchipot and Paléologue. Franchipot was still paralyzed by the apparition of Bigarot. Paléologue shrugged, bit his lip, then coolly produced his cigaret-case. He saw that everything had been lost at one blow—and he understood that this terrible fat man had been playing with him all the while.

"At least," he said calmly, "you will never find the treasure!"

Bigarot laughed again.

"The treasure," he answered, "is in a boat, which is moored at one of the city wharves. To find the boat is a matter of elimination. It was clever to leave the craft there—therefore I guessed that it would be done."

Franchipot uttered a low groan. Paléologue shrugged again, and picked a cigaret from his case. Davignan made an imperative gesture to Bigarot, who came forward and began to make his verbal report.

Kent, still ignorant that he was at all involved, stood watching proceedings with a grim smile of satisfaction upon his lips.

Suddenly Bigarot turned his head and saw that Paléologue was smoking. A loud cry burst from his lips. He whirled and flung himself toward Paléologue. The latter, smiling, tossed away the cigaret.

"Too late!" he said.

Bigarot stopped short, inarticulate; then burst into a storm of oaths. Davignan came forward, wondering. He caught Bigarot by the shoulder with an angry question.

"What is it?" repeated Bigarot shrilly, and pointed at Paléologue. "The cigarets—ah, the cursed one has escaped me after all! Look!"

Paléologue, staggering a little, uttered his old gay laugh.

"Aye, Bigarot!" he said throatily. "Aye—escaped you! Kent, talk all you damned please—I'm done!"

With a cry of agony, Franchipot caught him as he fell.

X

IN the little garden of the Marquet house—the garden which was a replica of the

summer garden of the kings across the river—walked Kent and M. Davignan.

Davignan had been doing a great deal of talking.

"You understand, *monsieur*," he said in conclusion, "this Paléologue had, as you Americans call it, nicely 'framed' you. You were pretending to be an English scientist. Therefore, he laid the crime of the robbery upon your shoulders."

"I see that all right," said Kent dryly. He had made full confession of his imposture. "But I don't see how you and Bigarot suspected him. His alibi was perfect. The evidence against me was good. Why was I not arrested? Why did you go after him?"

Davignan rubbed his nose thoughtfully, smiling as usual.

"My dear *monsieur*," he said, "we of Provence are a peculiar race. We have our prejudices, you comprehend—our superstitions, perhaps. Now, in this matter, do you remember that card-game in Singapore, where we first met?"

"Yes," said Kent.

"And you found me in company with Paléologue, was it not?"

"Yes."

Davignan made an expressive gesture.

"Well, that is all. I was keeping my eye upon this fine gentleman. When he accepted your challenge and declared that he would steal the royal treasure, I believed him implicitly. That is all."

"In other words," exclaimed Kent, "it was a hunch?"

Davignan merely shrugged and waved his plump hand. Then he clapped Kent on the shoulder, with abrupt change of subject. His twinkling eyes met those of the American.

"*Monsieur*, what are your plans?"

"Plans?" Kent hesitated a moment, and bitterness crept into his face. "I have none."

"Then you have refused that offer from the Saigon firm?"

Kent's eyes widened in amazement.

"How the devil do you know anything about that offer?"

"Suppose you answer my question first. You refused it?"

"I did not answer it," said Kent harshly. "I could not accept it, for when the firm discovered that I had been pretending to be another man—"

To his astonishment, Davignan uttered a roar of laughter.

"*Saperlipopette!* I told them all about you!"

"You did? When?"

"When they applied to my office for your record," said Davignan. "I advised them to employ you, by all means. They took my advice. That is all."

Kent stared at him for a moment.

"You advised them to employ *me*?" he said at length. "When you knew that—"

"Listen, my friend!" The rotund features of Davignan became very earnest. "I am accustomed to read men, *me!* I am fat, therefore men think me a fool; that is why Bigarot and I have together made a record in the world. Now I say to you that here is your chance to go north to Shanghai, to carve out for yourself a great business career. Why did you come to Hué, tell me?"

Kent met the black eyes squarely, and did not flinch.

"To steal the royal treasure," he said.

"So I supposed. The treasure attracts many flies, but you are not fitted for such dreams, you! One must have special ability, special knowledge, such as M. Paléologue had—in cigarets, for example. One must have neither faith nor honor. One must, in effect, possess a special equipment, most of which you lack—fortunately. How blind you are, my friend! You came here seeking a royal treasure—and all you could see was gold!"

Kent stood wordless, comprehending the fund of kindly wisdom in this man; but at Davignan's last words he glanced up inquiringly. His eyes fell upon the slender figure of Marie, coming toward them from the house. A tinge of red crept into his cheeks.

"I understand," he said in a low voice. "Yes; yet, in a sense, you are wrong, Davignan. All that Paléologue could see was gold. After I had come here—well, no matter! Perhaps I shall accept that offer and go to Shanghai. Perhaps!"

Davignan glanced at the approaching figure, then smiled suddenly.

"I hasten to remove myself. I have another—what you call it?—another hunch. *Saperlipopette!* M. Kent, you are not blind after all. I apologize. *Au revoir!*"

Kent went toward the girl, whose gray eyes welcomed him with a kindling smile.

